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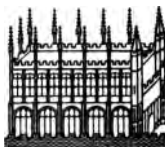
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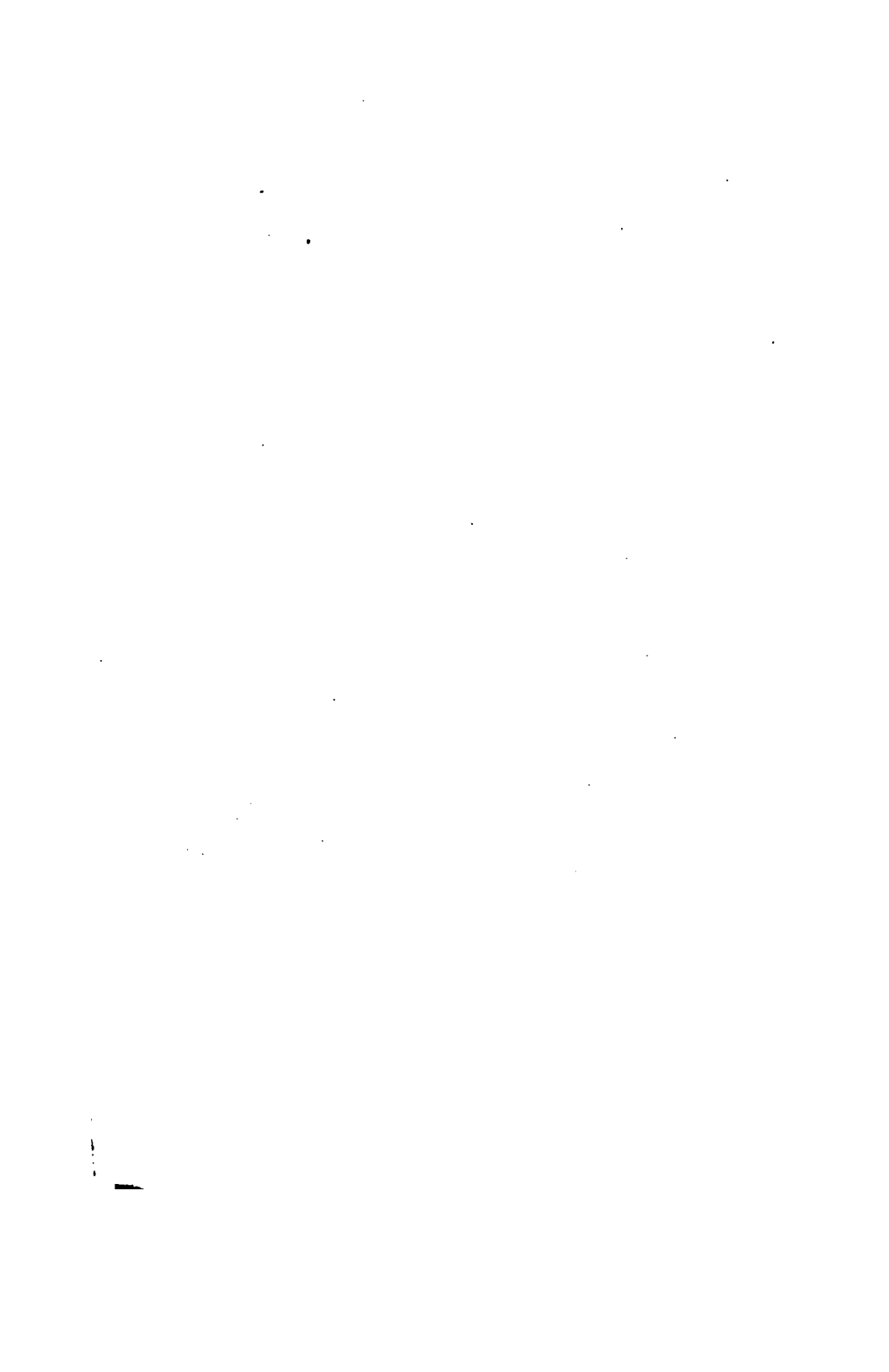
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**GERALD MARLOWE'S WIFE.**



# GERALD MARLOWE'S WIFE.

A Nobel.

BY

J. C. AYRTON,

AUTHOR OF "A SCOTCH WOOING."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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# GERALD MARLOWE'S WIFE.

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## CHAPTER I.

GERALD MARLOWE'S DIARY (*continued*).

*Aug. 1st.*—My father has been moved into my mother's morning room in the afternoons for several days past. He is so much better that he is able to listen to light reading, and to take pleasure in hearing the piano. Here Hester's musical talents come into requisition, and I observe that she chooses invariably the style of music my father likes;—no symphonies nor sonatas, her own favourite school, but simple things, airs he knows, or reveries

and morceaux, like the minor pieces of Mendelssohn or Heller. It is evident that it would be impossible for us to leave the Grange, but I have had scruples about living here so completely, and I proposed to my mother yesterday, in my father's presence, that we should come over every day, returning to Allingham at his bedtime, early enough for a late dinner. But he was so distressed, my mother so horrified, at the bare idea of our leaving the Grange at all, that I said no more. I have spoken to Hester about staying, asking her if it was unpleasant to her to be away so long from her own home. But she answered me earnestly that she liked best to remain here; and I was silent, remembering the day when she told me how infinitely she preferred the Grange to Allingham.

*Aug. 3rd.*—My father noticed to-day that

Hester looked pale. I have remarked the same thing more than once, and have urged her to take more exercise and rest, for she has had but the briefest snatches of relaxation during the past month. "She felt quite well, she was very strong," she replied to my father, as she had always replied to me. But he was inexorable, and insisted that she should take a drive or ride daily. The carriage was out with my mother; I know that Hester is timid about riding strange horses, and we have not had any of her horses or men servants here for want of room. I proposed, therefore, to walk with her; she assented, as I have before noticed that she always does to any offer of companionship on my part. She put on her hat in two minutes; she has several masculine virtues, and punctuality and utter lack of fussy feminine vanity are among them.

We started for our walk, through country as sweet, as still, as unspoiled by time or change as when it witnessed the death of Gaveston, or filled Shakspeare's youth with the images of verdure, of peace, of bloom, with which his plays are redolent.

Through fields, by honeysuckle-laden hedgerows ; through copses, leafy in the luxuriance of early August ; by stiles, at which trysts might well be held ; through gabled villages deep in orchards, and vocal with the hum of children and the songs of birds and bees, we passed along ; scenes which had we been happy lovers would have been peopled with memories of our love, for this is the country in which her youth and mine were spent. Hester, I conclude, has no love memories ; mine are of another than of her. It was impossible to choose paths through which I had not walked with Florence, for

she was more to me than all the world beside for eight long years, and here too her childhood and youth were passed. Here was the gate where I had been used to watch for her coming, as she took her favourite evening walk with her little sisters; here was the stile by which we stood while we gathered honeysuckles and wreathed them for her hair; here runs the brook, out of which I, a stripling of fifteen, pulled her, a golden-headed maiden of ten, falling in love with her as I carried her home, her long locks and draggled white frock dripping over my shoulder and down my legs.

I roused myself abruptly, banishing these recollections, and turned to speak to Hester. She was looking at me, I found, thinking, doubtless, what a moody wretch I was, and reflecting what a cheerful com-



panion Heaven had blessed her with for life.

"You must think me very ungrateful," I said, moved to sudden confession, "not to have thanked you long before this for all you have done for my father, and through him for all of us."

"Do not thank me," she said, hurriedly. "I do not deserve thanks; I like it——"

"That is why we ought to thank you," I interrupted.

She said nothing, but she looked up at me timidly for an instant, and then dropped her eyes. I saw that some thought I could not read, that she would not tell, was giving depth and softness to those eyes. I have said that she is little—at least as compared with my own five feet eleven of height—it gives her one advantage. When she looks up at you her glance ceases to

meet yours, so to speak, with that abrupt and searching bluntness which I have often remarked, and you catch what Leslie so truly described as the "beam and effluence" of the upward gaze.

It struck me now that in the brown wells of these eyes regarding me with that voiceless and unfathomable pathos we meet in the eyes of some dumb creature, might lie the manifestation of feelings to which her voice would never give utterance; that there might be depths in her nature for which she would for ever lack the power of expression. What am I, that I should have presumed to take my little measure of her? Doubtless she has feelings, wishes, aspirations as far above me as her quiet, reticent, unselfish, helpful life has been above my weak, indolent, murmuring existence.

As my memory thus ran, sorrowing,

through the faultful past, we came to one of those high gates by which the Midlandshire farmer thinks to make the way impassable to trespassers ; but I found no difficulty in climbing it. It presented a greater impediment to Hester's progress ; she stood and looked at it with some visible trepidation.

“ I will lift you down ; do not attempt to jump,” I said.

She did not draw back, and I took hold of her. As I had her thus an instant in my arms—it was the first time I had so held her—the idea that I would throw myself then and there, metaphorically speaking, at her feet, flashed across my brain. If I had sought her pardon for past coldness and neglect ; if I had entreated her indulgence for the future ; if I had reminded her that life had nothing more in store for either of us but what we could make it

yield together, I wonder what her answer would have been?

I shall never know; for even as I, thus deliberating, held her a moment passive in my grasp, the noise of wheels whirling along the byway upon which we were debouching caught my ear. I put her down and looked round. The carriage flew past us, but I saw a face I knew, I heard a familiar voice crying excitedly to the coachman to stop. The lane was a short cut from the W—— railway station to Hexham. The carriage contained my aunt and uncle and their family returning from the Continent, where my uncle had taken the summer duty of a foreign chaplain.


He nodded; my aunt greeted us with effusion.

“How well you both look!” she cried.  
“And how is your dear father to-day,

Gerald? How I wish I had been at home. What a sad time it must have been. Mrs. Marlowe, this is my first opportunity of congratulating you. How is your dear mother, Gerald? Tell her I shall come to see her to-morrow. We have had such a charming six weeks; it has done us all so much good. But we keep you from your delightful walk. Good-by, good-by."

We interpolated words and replies to the best of our abilities, and shook hands all round. They whirled off again; but the penitent mood they had put to flight did not revisit me. We walked back to the Grange more silently than we had come, if that were possible. What a dull dog Hester must think me!

I do not know whether I am most glad or most sorry that I was interrupted. I comprehend too little of my wife's real



character to feel sure that it would have been safe to place myself so unreservedly in her hands. It is not likely now that I shall ever try her thus; for the impulse may never return again, and it is a thing I could never do in cold blood. The influence of the scene and of her eyes were very near making a fool of me; for how could I have put what I have to say? Could I have explained that I did not propose to her for her money, but in a mad moment of weakness, goaded by my mother's entreaties, and not thinking for one instant that she would take me at my word. Nay, the second injury would have been far deeper than the first.

*Aug. 6th.*—The question debated above has occupied me a good deal lately, and I have settled that I will say nothing, but that I will let silence speak for me. Every

day this week Hester and I have been out together, and in our *têtes-à-tête* I have tried to make myself companionable. She sees it, I think, and tries to meet me halfway ; but it is late in the day to begin being frank and easy, and she seems to find it very difficult to be cordial. Perhaps she has been too deeply offended. But no, I do not imagine that her nature is relentless. One thing is certain—we can never be comrades again. I have awakened too completely to the perception that as I am a man, so is she a woman. But perhaps in years to come, when youth's fitful fever is over, we may settle down, with full comprehension and experience of one another, into the modicum of domestic comfort possessed by most of our neighbours. A cheerful prospect truly—commonplace matrimony used to be to me a synonym for weariness itself—a con-

summation differing a little from the sanguine hopes with which I looked forward once to a sequel of the romance of my life.

*Aug. 7th.*—To-day is my birthday; the day on which I attain the magnificent age of twenty-four. Hester astonished and touched me not a little this morning, by showing that she remembered the day, and by giving me a present such as I could accept without feeling oppressed by any sense of the magnitude of her resources. It is a small and plainly but handsomely bound book of poetry; the writings of some of those Caroline poets, whose songs and lyrics are among the quaintest and sweetest in our language, poets seldom met with except in fragments of quotation, yet most deserving of fuller acquaintance—Suckling, Herrick, Crashaw, Lovelace, and others as tuneful and as eccentric. When I had duly



examined and thanked her for the book, I asked her how she knew the day, for I was aware that my father never remembered a date in his life, and that my birthday was always a melancholy day, never alluded to by my mother. It is also the anniversary of the death of her eldest and favourite son, my brother Arthur.

"I have known the day for the last twenty years," Hester answered; "since we were little children together."

"When is your birthday?" I asked, suddenly, penitent at the reflection that it had never even struck me that she too must have a natal day.

"It was last month, the 23rd," she said, hesitating. I had the sense merely to give her tardy good wishes, and not to attempt a gift. I do not want her to imagine that I will receive nothing from her without offering a return.

"Since we were children together!" I said no more then, but I have been thinking a good deal of her words, and recalling dim recollections of those far distant days. My memory is not good for the events of my childhood. I was a very forward imp, I remember, though too delicate to do much more than read or listen to tales such as children heard and read in those times; no semi-philosophical, nor scientific allegories combining amusement with instruction—odious thought—but the "Arabian Nights," "Jack the Giant Killer," "Snow White and Rosy Red," "The Old Soldier and the Twelve Dancing Princesses," "Cinderella," "Bluebeard," and many another fascinating legend which maturer knowledge has traced to an antiquity as venerable as that of the tales of Scheherezade.

Twenty years ago Florence was not born. Was it possible that Hester and I

were allies before my fascinating little cousin closed my eyes to all feminine attractions but her own? Looking very far back, to the dawn of memory, indeed, I can fancy I remember a friendship in which all the strength, all the sense, all the unselfishness, was on the side of the girl; a friendship not broken till she went abroad with Miss Hampson for her education, about the time that the charms of a public school first dazzled my childish mind, eager to mix with comrades of my own sex and age. What was Hester like in those days? I cannot remember, though I have tried hard.

*Aug. 8th.*—Why does a man love one woman and not another? Why is one hair on *the* woman's head dearer to him than all the virtues and fascinations of others, no matter how much more beautiful, how much more sensible, how much more

loving? It is not that soul is drawn to soul by some ineffable and irresistible attraction, for then we should never make the senseless and irrevocable mistakes that men make every day in affairs of the heart; gilding false metal, and throwing aside the pure gold.

We ought, surely, to be able to give some reason for the passion which throws its all upon one cast. The converse of the Dr. Fell argument is certainly no sufficient nor quotable conclusion. It is a question which I am not able to ventilate—hideous expression—for I cannot well discuss it with Hester, even were she capable of giving an answer; and my mother would stare at the bare suggestion of so idiotic a topic. I wish I had here for a good half-hour that Scottish lass who was heard by Sydney Smith about to harangue her part-

ner, in the pause of a dance, on "love in the abstract;" perhaps she could tell me why a man, knowing that one woman would make a fond wife, a devoted mother, passes her by, to fling his all at the feet of another without a tenth part of her virtues or graces; perhaps caring nothing for him, and even showing that she cares nothing.

I think I have been wasting my time and paper in the above sapient and philosophical inquiry; the case puzzled Solomon, and how can I expect to solve it? But I let all I write down here stand. "*Forsan hæc olim meminisse juvabit*," as Goldsmith said to Johnson, apropos of the heads on Temple Bar.





## CHAPTER II.

GERALD MARLOWE'S DIARY (*continued*).

*Aug. 17th.*—My father is becoming day by day more wrapped up in Hester. As his intellect brightens, he understands more and more fully what he owes to her, and what she is to him.

“My dear, I used to wish I had a daughter,” he said to her to-day.


“And I know now what it is to have a father,” she answered, smiling, with tears in her eyes.

It is wonderful, truly, how she interests and amuses him; she seems to have the power of divining what book, what paper, what music will please him best, and at

critical times what food will tempt him, what temperature will suit him. He is never left alone when we are out; my mother likes reading aloud, and if he is not inclined to hear, he can always have the society of either my aunt or my uncle from the Rectory. The company of the first he endures, that of the second is a real pleasure to him. It is a touching bond which unites the two last of a generation. But whoever has been with him, my father's countenance invariably brightens only at Hester's entrance into perfect content and peace. She has noticed how he misses "us,"—"her," I say—and has tried hard to give up these long walks, saying that she does not require them, that she has air enough these hot days sitting on the terrace where my father's sofa is moved out there after luncheon, when the shadow of

the house throws its protection over the space in front of the library window. But he is, and was always, the most unselfish of creatures; he insists upon her devoting at least two of the hours before our seven o'clock dinner to outdoor exercise. She prefers walking to riding, she says, and under the circumstances, so do I. A regulation ride along high roads is my abhorrence, and she is not audacious horse-woman enough to debouch from beaten tracks.

I begin to think, as I see more of Hester, that I have gone very far, after the manner of mankind, to discover very little—*i.e.*, in the matter of our marriage. Woman-like, she had doubtless aspirations after family life; the domesticities seem to suit her. It was never wonderful that she should marry, and under the circumstances it is not, per-






haps, so very surprising that she married me. Alone in the world, not apt at making intimacies, the thought of being connected with those she knew, and that liked her, was attractive. My father has always had a great regard for her ; I can see now that my mother courted her for years, and she is matter-of-fact enough to think that I must like her, if I proposed to her. Hester's is just the kind of character that would shrink with distaste from the idea of being transplanted into new scenes and among strange faces. She is attached, no doubt, to Allingham, the home of her childhood. I have no property to call me from this neighbourhood, for our Irish estates have long ago dwindled down to a few barren acres of bog and moorland.

She had, therefore, had I behaved like a man of sense and feeling, every reason to

look forward in her marriage to that modicum of domestic comfort and consideration which seems to satisfy most women. I fear that she has been awfully disappointed, and I regret, too late, that she was thus cavalierly sought, and thus carelessly treated. She could never have been a romantic woman; little enough would have satisfied her. I ought to have been man and gentleman enough to have given her that little. It was I who took the initiative; she tried to bestow upon me, with generous unreserve, all that she had to offer in return.

There are many—no, there are *not* many—characters in the world such as hers. Heaven has granted indeed to few what it has denied to her, that divine spark which is commonly called Romance or Imagination; but to be generous, upright, unselfish,



helpful, is within the power of many, but within the pleasure of few. I will never complain that Hester has not more to bestow; she gives so liberally of all she has. Nay, I ought to be thankful that she is no romantic girl; for what could she ever reap then of her marriage with a disappointed aimless man, but bitter disappointment?

*Aug. 21st.*—My father's anxiety for our happiness is kind, but there is a point at which even affection may step beyond the proper limits of solicitude. The penetralia of married life I hold to be sacred ground.

This morning I came upon a picture pretty enough at first sight; Hester sitting with her cheek against the arm of my father's sofa, her dark head and robust contour in piquant contrast to his silvered hair and beard, and his worn and emaciated

but still distinguished features and figure. He was turning upon her a look of the most anxious and tender concern. I could not see her face, but I stood a moment watching the group before disturbing them by speech. I heard thus, most unwittingly, the fag end of some previous conversation.

“And he makes you happy; he loves you, my child?”

“He is very kind,” I heard her say, with hesitation. I suppose that under no circumstances could Hester ever be led to tamper with the truth.

I heard my father sigh, though I moved hastily away, unseen; indignant, yet touched. “Kind!” an appropriate epithet, certainly, from a wife of six months. Her words, her tone, set me thinking, very uneasily, that I may again have miscalculated her character. I seem to write

one day but, to contradict the next. Woman is an enigma, and I was always an idiot at guessing riddles.

*Aug. 31st.*—"To-morrow is the first of September," my father remarked this evening. "Of course you will shoot as usual, Gerald? I wish I could be with you again, my boy. You will have better ground this year, and the advantage of well-trained and experienced keepers."

"I don't know whether I shall shoot," I said, hesitating. "It is stupid work alone. I may, perhaps, in the mornings, but I shall come back to lunch."

"You will not do much that way," said my mother, a little testily. She has the true British mania for fieldsports and athletics of all kinds. A man who can walk thirty miles a day, or get one hundred runs off his own bat, is of a positive order

of excellence that is very patent to her eyes. I have been through the phase myself; but I begin to see there are other aims in life worthy of emulation. Women are always admirers of brute force. "Well, I shall see," I said.

"Hester will lose her walks," observed my father, after a pause.

"Oh! do not mind me," she cried, hurriedly. "I can have the carriage over, it will do the horses good."

"Will you have the pony-chaise here at one instead, and bring me my lunch, Hester?" I asked.

She looked at me with one of her old abrupt, inquisitorial glances. Apparently I looked sufficiently anxious, and she thought it was not mere regulation civility that prompted me.

"I should like to, very much," she

said, not without an emphasis on the adverb.

“Then I’ll take the distant covers in the morning, and turn homewards in the afternoon. We will have a fresh meeting-place every day, till we have scoured the country round.”

She smiled, as I have seen her smile on my father, a frank, glowing, sudden smile, which lights up her face, generally dark and sombre, with gleam and colouring, “sweetness and light.”

*Sept. 2nd.*—I see I shall do very little shooting in the afternoons. Hester came to meet me yesterday, true to time and place. We lunched, and after a deliberate sitting, we packed the chaise and débris off home, and started—keepers, dogs, and man and wife—to beat slowly homewards. The first bird that fell was badly wounded; as ill

luck would have it, it fluttered as it lay before us, and its eye seemed to wear an expression of almost human agony. The sight totally unnerved Hester, she took it up, its blood dripping on her grey dress, and shed tears over it. The sight of them made me feel as if I were a murderer. Her next thought was for me, who stood looking on, a very fool, ashamed of myself, and ashamed of being ashamed.

“I am spoiling your sport,” she cried. “I will go home.”

“You shall not,” I said. “Or stay, I will go with you. I will shoot no more to-day.”

She was too truly unnerved to contest the point then. We walked home slowly; I had told Dobson to put the bird out of its pain at once, and I did my best to divert Hester's mind from the thought of the



victim's dying struggle. But as we neared the Grange she said to me, decisively—

“I shall not come out to-morrow; I will not be a marplot.”

“Not come out?” I cried.

“Decidedly not; I will not spoil your sport again like this. I am always foolish.”

“If you do not come I will shoot no more, to-morrow or any other day,” I said, firmly.

“Nonsense!” she said, looking up at me with firmly set face.

“Oh, I can be as obstinate as you!” I said, laughing at the extreme decision of her expression.

I would not go in before the point was settled; we stood in the porch and debated it. She was stiff, but I was stiffer. It is settled that she is still to join me at two every day. I am always out by nine, and

five hours slaughter ought to content any man.

*Sept. 19th.*—More than a fortnight has passed, and I have recorded nothing, because the days seemed to pass in an unbroken routine. Yet, looking back, I see that there is progress in several matters. My father has been so well that Hester has had no excuse for refusing to comply with my programme. She has joined me every day at some fixed spot. After luncheon we have sent keepers, dogs, chaise, débris, and spoils straight home, while we have strolled leisurely towards the same direction, by byways and those short cuts which always turn out so long.

Under the influence, I suppose, of this glorious September weather, spending afternoon after afternoon thus untrammelled and unobserved, Hester has really grown

almost at ease with me. She smiles freely, she talks frankly, sometimes she is even guilty of a laugh. More than once, too, she has called me "Gerald" quite naturally; before she has always stumbled at it. "Mr. Marlowe" seemed to be perpetually hovering on her tongue—I am sure I don't know why, she can't have called me anything but Gerald, I imagine, when we were children together. As the gêne of the position wears off, we begin to see more deeply, I fancy, into each other's mind and character. There are few things in heaven and earth that have not been discussed in our philosophy during these long September afternoons.

Now that men are filling the houses round about, I have been asked two or three times to join parties, but I stick to the routine I laid down myself; I get

chaffed sometimes, but oftener the state of my father's health precludes argument or jest. I was set down so completely for an arrant fortune-hunter that no man can possibly imagine that I find any attraction in the company of my wife, or else I should be infallibly voted the spooniest bridegroom that Midlandshire sporting experience can furnish for example. But I care little what they think. I have been away so much, at school and college and abroad, that I have no real intimates here; the type of Midlandshire squire prevalent about us is not of the order with which I most readily coalesce. And it is right that I should think of Hester; even my society, in this country and air, must be better and livelier for her than the dull perpetual round of the invalid attendant's duties.

*Sept. 23rd.*—I have this afternoon alluded in conversation with Hester to a topic on which I little thought to have ever entered with her, or any one, and the consequences of my rashness were disastrous. We had been speaking of our ideals, in character and in action; hers was that of the devoted priest living and dying cheerfully to spread the faith dearer to him than ease or life.

“Mine is less saintly, but, I think, as grand,” I said; “it is the patriot spending his energies in his country’s cause.”

“Why do you not go into Parliament?” she said, suddenly; “you might emulate your ideal.”

“How can I?” I asked; “you know my opinions and my father’s. I am tied hand and foot by circumstances, or I would show

you, Hester, that the man you have married is not an utterly idle, self-seeking, purposeless fool."

"I never thought he was," she said, softly. "But I do think, Gerald, that your father would rather that you should take any line you liked and thought right than that you should do nothing——"

"You despise me!" I interrupted, turning upon her with a look that would fain have read her very soul.

"I have told you I do not," she said, gently. "It is of your own happiness that I think. I know that you can never be contented living the life you lead. Do you not shudder at the idea of an existence spent like this?"

"I thought the day was splendid, and the walk delightful," I said, a little

sulkily, purposely misunderstanding her. She understood me well enough to smile ; I think, too, she coloured a little.

“It is not always September,” she said. “Excuse me, Gerald, if I presume ; but your career began too well to end except in distinction.”

“Every door is barred with gold, and opens but to golden keys,” I answered, heedlessly.

I am certain that the colour rushed to her cheeks at this.

“Yet he allowed that he ‘must mix with action, lest he perish by despair,’” she quoted, a bitter ring in her tones, ordinarily equable and gentle. I made no answer, but perhaps the same thought was in her mind as in mine, that circumstances precluded me from the resources of the hero of “Locksley Hall :” “forward, forward, I

might not range." I was fettered with double security to home.

She said no more; it was fortunate that we were not far from the Grange, for my unlucky speech had at any rate effectually stopped the conversation. Hester's manner was chilly all the evening. I daresay that no one else noticed, though I did, that she was different; but it seemed as if a wall had grown up again between us. She looked, moved, and spoke like the old silent, self-contained Hester Dombrain towards whom I had always felt so little drawn, not as the wife and daughter of the house, at home, and at ease.

*Sept. 24th.*—I have been alarmed to-day, and basely suspicious, without reason. At two the pony-chaise arrived at the appointed place of meeting, with lunch, but with no Hester. I was unworthy enough



to feel certain at the first blush that I had offended her so deeply the day before that she wished to show me that she still bore displeasure against me. I was almost sufficiently ashamed of myself when the boy who drove gave me a little folded paper in her handwriting. It ran as follows :—

“DEAR GERALD,—Your father is not quite so well this afternoon, and I do not like to leave him. Do not be alarmed, for we are not certain that there is any real reason for fear. Your mother says you need not hurry home.

“In haste,

“H. M.”

I put the note into my waistcoat pocket ; they were the first lines in her handwriting.

that I had ever received. During our courtship (strange misnomer) we had met every day, and since our marriage we had never been separated for more than three or four hours at a time. I cross-questioned the boy narrowly.

"What was the matter ; was Lord Marlowe ill when you left?"

"No, I don't know as he was, sir," he answered, "not more nor ordinary."

But I did not feel easy ; I drove home as fast as I could.

Hester met me outside the porch as I came in. Her manner was at once eager and constrained.

"Your father seems the same as usual again ; it was only a momentary faintness. He is asleep now. Before you go into the library, I want to say something I could not say in there. Will you forgive my

presumption yesterday? I know I have no right to interfere or advise."

"No right, Hester?" I said, taking her hand. "Am I not your husband? Are you not my wife? Who should have any right if you have not?"

"You are very good," she said, her voice tremulous.

"I might have been, perhaps, if I had always had counsel and influence like yours at my side," I said.

She did not attempt to withdraw the hand I still held. Her cheek flushed, her lip trembled. I don't know what I might not have said and done, had not the library door opened. My mother put out her head.

"Your father is just awake, Gerald; he heard your footsteps on the gravel, and is inquiring for you."

It was only to ask me what sport I had had, his never failing question. I never felt less inclined to enter into the details of the slaughter than at that moment. But Hester had already escaped upstairs, and I went slowly into the library.





### CHAPTER III.

GERALD MARLOWE'S DIARY (*continued*).

*Oct. 1st.*—We were late this evening. Hester ran upstairs at once to her dressing-room. I went in to see my father. I found a letter from Robertson lying on the library table: it was to say that he had got settled at his new box in Argyleshire, and to ask me to join him and half a dozen of the old Balliol men there as soon as possible.

My father, who knew the writing, inquired how Robertson was, and whether he was in Scotland.

"Quite well. Yes, he is at Inverarder."

"I suppose he claims your old promise, to go and help him with the grouse the year he took possession."

"Yes; but I shall not go."

"Not go?" said my father. "It will do you good after three months spent at the side of a helpless old man——"

"I don't care to go," I interrupted.

"But he was one of your greatest intimates. Are not the men there pleasant?"

"Oh yes, pleasant enough. But I don't care now for bachelor parties. I should feel like a fish out of water."

"What do you care for?" broke in my father, sadly. "That is what troubles me more than all my cares as I lie here thinking. I have wanted to speak to you, Gerald," he added, turning round to face me as I leant against the arm of his sofa. "Come here, my lad, where I can see you while I speak. We shall not be interrupted now for half an hour. You must excuse the freedom of the old father who cares for you

more than he has ever cared for any living thing. You were always my pet, my son, even as the little, delicate, youngest child ; and since the others left me you have been everything to me. I have watched you narrowly, Gerald, and I cannot die happy, thinking you are not so."

"Who is happy?" I asked, bitterly.

"Surely you might be," he said. "You are young and clever ; you have a name to open your way, and a rich, sensible, and good wife to help you. Cannot you make her happy ; cannot you be happy yourself——"

"Has Hester told you anything?" I said, firing up.

"Hester has told me nothing, but that you are good to her. But I can see that her lot is not what it ought to be. Few men have such a wife, Gerald ; she is

worthy of any man's passionate devotion——”

“Do not let us discuss my wife, father,” I began. “We are married, and it can never be undone. I have no romantic dreams, my wants are practical. What I require is a career; something, anything to do; any active employment that will give me plenty to think about, and plenty of occupation.”

“Well, I should have thought that you would find no lack of openings. If you are inclined for a political life I can do something to help you. I will write to my friend D——. I have some interest with the old party yet, though I have been of little use to them for years. Poverty is a sad marplot. You will never know—and I thank Heaven for it—the weight of embarrassment which has crippled my career.



You start fair and unfettered. I will get your mother to write for me to-morrow. Is your taste for the home or foreign service?"

"It would be no use your writing to Lord D——," I said, miserable at having to wound him, but feeling that I must now confess the truth. "It is on the opposite side that I must work, if I am to work at all."

"What! you are a Whig!" he cried.

"More than that, father."

He lay still a few minutes without speaking. I fear it was bitter indeed to him to have to hear this.

"Well, well," he said, rousing himself after awhile. "The time was when it would have wrung my very heart to know this. But earthly things trouble us less as the heavenly ones draw near; we are con-

tent to acknowledge that there is One who knows better than we do. A Radical may be a good fellow and fight fair, I suppose."

"Thank you, father," I said, eagerly. "I would have told you long ago, only I could not bear that any cloud should ever come between you and me."

"None ever could, unless, indeed, it were connected with your marriage. There is one point on which I have often wished to ask your forgiveness, Gerald. I must touch now upon the topic you have tabooed. I will never allude to it again. I have feared that we urged you unduly to this match; we did it for the best. You will not visit it upon another if we have wrecked your life. Your mother and I knew how we had suffered from want of means; we wished to make your future safe——"

He broke off suddenly, for we heard the

footsteps of my mother and Hester descending the stairs.

"I know you did it for the best ; forget it, father," I said, hurriedly, as they entered. His face cleared, and he lay back, at rest.

My mother's eyes fell upon Robertson's letter as she came in ; she asked the same question as my father had done.

"You will go, of course ; it will be a pleasant change. It must be very dull here for you, with none but women for companions. We must think of you as you have thought of us, Gerald."

"I am not going," I said, curtly, turning away.

"Not going ?" said Hester, softly, following me into the wide low window. "You like Mr. Robertson ; you would enjoy it ; it would do you good."

"I am very well as I am," I said.

“You all seem very anxious to get rid of me. Am I so very much in your way, Hester?”

I do not think she likes or understands badinage. She murmured something quite unintelligible, the colour flying into her cheeks. I wish she would not take everything au grand sérieux, and blush and look so embarrassed when I say anything of this kind to her. It must give lookers-on the idea that she is very ill at ease in my presence, and must make us appear ridiculous. Six months of married life ought to have worn this shyness off.

*Oct. 7th.*—I am doubly thankful I declined Robertson's invitation. I am not at all satisfied about my father; and, from a few words Hester let fall to-day, I am sure she is not satisfied either. He has not seemed to mend lately as he ought to do;

he is stationary, if not indeed retrograde. I have a horrible idea that his utterance is not quite so clear as it was a little while ago; and that his perceptions are not always so vivid and collected as they have been. Pray Heaven avert the catastrophe I so much dread!

*Oct. 17th.*—I was greatly shocked yesterday. The chaise arrived at the meeting place; Hester was not in it, nor had she sent any message for me, as she did before.

“Her ladyship couldn’t spare Mrs. Marlowe,” the boy said, in answer to my eager inquiries. “His lordship was not so well.”

I could not get anything definite out of him, so I drove home as quickly as the pony could go. I was a little reassured on reaching the Grange, to hear my mother’s voice in the drawing-room. She

was evidently entertaining visitors, and I knew that no one would have been admitted if she had thought my father really worse.

I went at once into the library, and found Hester assisting my father to change his position, always a work of some difficulty, and now he seemed less able to move than usual.

"Have you been worse to-day?" I asked, as I helped them.

"I felt faint this afternoon; but it passed off. I could not spare Hester, for your mother has been very much engaged to-day. I am afraid I am getting selfish, but it will not be for long, Gerald."

I could not speak; as Hester placed the cushions comfortably around and under him, he looked up at her with a smile.

"I am a most unconscionable time dying, my dear."

Tears rushed into her eyes.

"Don't, father!" I cried. "Don't say such terrible things!"

"I am getting perceptibly weaker, my son," he answered, gravely, but cheerfully. "Let the Almighty do what seems to Him best. But whenever it does come, my dear, remember—and you, Gerald, never forget—that the two last months have been the most peaceful and the happiest of my existence. It is to you, Hester, that I have chiefly owed this."

For the only answer she could make, Hester leant over him and kissed him. It was not from her eyes only that tears fell fast, as her dark hair mingled with his now snow-white locks.





## CHAPTER IV.

### MISS HAMPSON'S DIARY.


*The Grange. Oct. 21st.*—I left the inhabitants of the Grange in deep distress ; I came back to find them in yet greater trouble. To-day I returned with spirits unusually elated. I was pleased to have been of service to my friend, glad to have left her well enough to do without me, glad to have had good accounts of Lord Marlowe ; above all, glad to be on my way to the place which must always be “home” to me—the roof which shelters my adopted child. I had not heard from her for some days, but her silence had not given me any uneasiness ; her letters are never frequent, and



lately they had been most unwontedly buoyant and lengthy. I had written to tell her the day and hour on which I proposed returning. I looked out as the fly drove in, hoping to see her face at the window. To my horror, I saw that the shutters were all closed. The servant who opened the door after some delay had a countenance sorrowful enough to have told me, had I had any doubt, what had happened.

His lordship had had another attack two days ago, and had never spoken since. He died last night.

Hester came out, her eyes red, directly she heard my voice, shutting the library door after her. We spoke in whispers; there was little to tell beyond what the servant had told me. He had not suffered much, apparently. Lady Marlowe and her son were terribly affected. Lady Mar-



lowe was sleeping now, for the first time for three nights. Without thinking, I turned towards the library, generally the chief living room.

"Gerald is in there," said Hester, hesitating. "Shall we go upstairs?"

"I will not take you from him, my dear," I said, pleased to observe, even at such a moment, that they were together in their grief. I knew how sincerely Hester had always liked Lord Marlowe, and how fatherly he had been to her. The servant was beginning to move my box from the roof of the cab. I interposed, to hinder him.


"I will go to Allingham. I could not think of intruding now. If I am wanted, I will come at a moment's notice."

"Do stay!" she said; "they know you are expected. I cannot bear to let you go

away to that great empty house. You will not think me unkind if I have often to leave you alone. There is much you can help us in. Gerald wished me to ask you to stay."

She cannot call him "Mr. Marlowe" now: as the thought crossed my mind, I remembered that she was Lady Marlowe—my little Hester! But I know that nothing can change her to me.

*Nov. 1st.*—I have been able to be of some use, so I have remained. The funeral of a peer could not take place, I suppose, without some ceremony, and Lady Marlowe's especial desire is that all shall be done with due pomp and parade. But she is too ill to superintend anything. Mr. Marlowe—I cannot call him by his title yet—hates form and fuss; the routine of solemn etiquette disgusts him; Hester has almost as little




toleration for it. I save them all discussion of detail, when it is possible. When I think the responsibility of action too great, I consult Mr. Lister; the family solicitor ought to know the wishes of the family.

I see very little of Hester; she is always either with Mr. Marlowe or his mother; and I see nothing of Lady Marlowe, and only meet her son at meal times. He is kind and attentive, as he always is; but he never speaks unless he is obliged. I can see that he is terribly cut up; but even now I can observe also—with joy how deep!—that he treats Hester with a deference and regard which I never saw before in his demeanour to her; bare courtesy was all he used to show her.

*Nov. 3rd.*—The funeral takes place to-morrow; it is to be attended by the whole neighbourhood, I hear. The Rector and Lady

Marlowe are both more than inclined to the High Church opinions so prevalent, unhappily, in these days, and I hear from Mr. Lister that the ceremony is to be celebrated with all the fashionable accompaniments of choristers, surpliced clergy, and females bearing wreaths and flowers. I am sure it would have been more consonant to the good old lord's feelings, and to those of some of the mourners, to have laid him quietly to rest, with only those who were dear to him standing round his grave. But it is not my place to remonstrate or comment; in this case, as in all others, I do what I can to assist, feeling that I am but the hands, that the responsibility lies with others. There are certain things to be done: Lady Marlowe is still confined to her room. Mrs. Reginald Marlowe is staying with her daughter at Combermere, to which I hear



an heir is shortly hoped for; so that the Rector and Mr. Lister could have no help but mine in carrying out many of their arrangements. I am glad to have any opportunity of returning in some measure the many kindnesses this family have shown me; even did I not feel that in serving them I serve my darling Hester.

Deeply grieved as I am at the death of good old Lord Marlowe, much as I sympathize with the sorrow of his wife and son, I cannot keep my thoughts from running on more material considerations. Mr. Lister has just told me that the will is to be read to-morrow after the funeral; and this intelligence has given me much matter for surmise. I trust that these worldly anxieties are not altogether contemptible, for it is for Hester's sake and her husband's that I am thus concerned. If he be left

well off—but that I fear cannot be—the disparity in their circumstances will be lessened. I could not, of course, ask Mr. Lister any questions; he, equally of course, did not tell me anything; but my mind, as is perhaps natural under the uncertainty, keeps hovering, despite myself, round the subject. Money, notwithstanding all the old saws to the contrary, is an ingredient of the greatest importance in our happiness. For instance, though my after knowledge of him almost refuses to sanction the idea that Lord Marlowe is mercenary, I cannot fancy that he would ever have thought of marrying Hester had she not been so great an heiress. Independent, living in his own house, he would assume to himself and others the natural position of the head of the household, and not of a hanger-on upon his wife's means.

*Nov. 4th.*—The funeral, a grand pageant at which the whole neighbourhood was present, took place to-day. We have just heard the will read; and matters are even worse than I had ever feared. The terms leave a certain stipulated dowry to the Dowager Lady Marlowe (with the option of residence at the Grange). All residue whatever to his son. But this residue must be counted, for years to come, by hundreds only. The property is so deeply embarrassed that it will require years of the closest economy to clear it.

I asked Mr. Lister in private how this could be. There was money once; how did the old lord spend it.

“He had none to spend,” he answered, drily. “His father had involved his affairs so deeply, that the late lord inherited little more than a barren title.”



Mr. Lister gave me additional particulars, which may be summarized as follows. The estates, when there were estates to speak of, were chiefly in Ireland. The Marlowes are, it is true, an old Midlandshire family, but of their lands in this county nothing remains but two or three entailed farms round the Grange. In the reign of Elizabeth, the second son of the then Squire Marlowe went to Ireland, settled there, and gave the family name to his settlement, which developed into a thriving town. His descendants accumulated lands and riches ; the great grandson was ennobled, and took his title from the town which bore the family name. The Midlandshire Marlowes were still possessors of Hexham and all the English property.

“ You know, perhaps, what the Irish nobility were under the Georges,” wound up

Mr. Lister. "The Encumbered Estates Act disembarrassed them of all their Irish property, with the exception of a few acres of bog which no one was found to buy, just about the time that the head of the Irish branch—this lord's grandfather—succeeded to the Hexham property and the Grange, by the death of the last English Squire Marlowe. The late lord married a penniless high-born lady. Mr. Gerald has been wiser in his generation."

I sighed, and said nothing further. Hester's money-bags were even more necessary than I had imagined to the building up of the Marlowes.





## CHAPTER V.

### GERALD MARLOWE'S DIARY.

*Nov. 4th.*—The blow has fallen; and it is an awful one. I shall never again be the object of love tender as that I have lost now. But, terrible as is the stroke, it has not fallen with that stunning violence with which it must have descended three months ago; then the abruptness of the blow would have been too awful for endurance. Then I had nothing to look forward to but loneliness and despair.

Even lately, in these first hours of my agony, I have felt as if this desolation and this hopelessness were to be my present lot: but as I stood this evening by my father's

grave, there distilled upon me a healing balm. Life can never be the same again, but it may be life, and not blank wretchedness. In the quiet of the coming solitude, the dews of Heaven-sent consolation descended upon my stricken spirit. As I stood there five hours before in the garish blaze of day, in the midst of the gaping and motley crowd, it was a horror of desolation which had possession of me. I shed no tears then; it seems to me that they are never born of the bitterest agony: to-night they came like the gentle rain from heaven, speaking the promise of brighter days to come. The first gleam of consolation had stolen into my heart from the timid touch of my wife's hand. As we rode home in the carriage which conveyed also my mother and my uncle, Hester, under cover of her heavy mourning cloak, laid her hand gently, hesi-

tatingly, on mine. She neither spoke nor glanced at me. The silent presence of one who feels with you is the most soothing—to me the only endurable—form of sympathy or consolation. This she has given me for the last week, and I am not ungrateful. I took her hand in mine and pressed it, to convey to her some speechless intimation of my gratitude; as I felt its firm yet soft touch—the touch that had hovered so tenderly round my father's couch—I knew that I could never be left quite alone in the world while my wife was bound to me by recollections such as this.

I think she is aware that I do not undervalue or mistake her, although I have spent the remaining hours of this day alone.


*Nov. 5th.*—Yesterday I hardly took in the terms of my father's will sufficiently to have

any clear idea of the state of affairs it unfolded. To-day I have had some conversation with Mr. Lister, and I am humiliated and astonished at the full revelation. No wonder the world, which always knows our affairs better than we know them ourselves, should have set me down as a fortune-hunter. From the details respecting the Irish property it seems that if I had money, matters might not be irretrievable: the few hundred acres remaining, once thought worthless, are found to be rich in coal. Mr. Lister hinted that my wife had enough and to spare for working. I silenced him—once, I hope, for all—by telling him that I had never recognised that what is hers is mine. My father little thought that the sense of poverty, which would have been a trifle to me, unfettered and independent, would hang like a double millstone round my neck as the

pauper husband of a rich woman, without even a roof that I can call my own.

*Nov. 7th.*—There is a chance that my mother may decline to live at the Grange. My Aunt Oldcastle has written to say that she is lonely, finds the expenses of living heavy, and proposes that my mother should join her in housekeeping. She seems inclined to try, and thinks of going soon, as she requires change. We must, of course, go to Allingham when she leaves; it will not do to stay here to be turned out, if the double-household project fail, and I cannot fancy my mother under any roof but her own. But I should be thankful if she were to resign the Grange to me. I love it as much as I hate Allingham. I have a horror of its great, cold, draughty corridors, and its huge comfortless rooms, big enough for a lecture hall or a table-d'hôte. I have

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reminiscences that are a caution of my courting days there.

*Nov. 11th.*—The bells which tolled their requiem for my father a week ago are clashing out to-day a peal of joy. My uncle has been here, brimful of fuss and exultation, to tell my mother that there is an heir to Combermere. A year ago what agony would not this news have caused me? now I feel dazed and apathetic, dead to all outward things. My chief idea seems to be that it would have been more decorous to have repressed so public an expression of their pride. They might surely have been contented to have rung the bells of Combermere, remembering for whom the Hexham chimes tolled out their last sad tones. But it is an object of paramount importance to all considerations of delicacy that there is an heir to all the Wyuns.



I sneer, but the words of Charles Lamb are running riot, nevertheless, in the chambers of my brain. "The children of Alice," he says, "call Bartrum father."

*Nov. 21st.*—My mother has left to-day, and we go to-morrow to Allingham. I hope that it may not always be my home, but I have long ceased to kick against the inevitable, and I have resigned myself piously to dree my weird now in patience, wherever it may take me. I can never again feel quite alone under the roof which covers Hester; the last four months have shown me too plainly what she is, and her sorrow, even more than her helpfulness, has knitted my spirit to hers. She has not shown her sense of our loss by many tears; she is not of the order of women who weep when the deeper waves of trial overwhelm them; she would meet the fiercest agonies

with dry and *tearless* eyes. But how she has grieved I can read in the very tones of her voice, in her altered countenance and mien.

We do not talk of my father, but an occasional word let fall unconsciously, a sigh, a look, show that her thoughts, like mine, are perpetually occupied with our loss. To-day we are alone. Miss Hampson is gone to undertake, at her own request, a task in which she delights, that of assisting to prepare Allingham for the residence of her adopted child. It has now been empty for months. I have not seen it since I went there daily, a churlish and sullen visitor, as suitor for its mistress's hand; but the remembrance of its blazing whiteness, its blatant, isolated importance, its empty vastness, give me the shudders now.

*Nov. 22nd.*—We are not designed by

Fate, it seems, to make our abode again at Allingham. Last night, just before bedtime, I drew aside the library curtains to look out upon the terrace, lit by the faint starlight, for there is no moon now. Hester, looking too, cried out. Turning my eyes in the direction in which she pointed, I saw a distant dull red light, which, as we gazed in silent wonder, shot up in brighter coruscations streaming with the course of the wind.

"It is Allingham," she cried.

"It must be on fire," I said.

I ran out to order a horse to be saddled. As I stood in the hall hastily putting on my boots and overcoat, a mounted messenger came rattling up to the door, an express from Miss Hampson to apprise me of the catastrophe. In lighting the flues to warm the rooms for our reception, part of

the woodwork of a flooring in the principal wing had caught fire. The night was frosty and sharp, a strong wind was blowing, and in the wrong direction. They had sent for engines, but the nearest were at W——, three miles off.

Hester, who had followed me out into the hall, inquired hastily if Miss Hampson and the servants were all in safety.

"Quite safe, my lady ; but there is every fear that the west wing will be burnt down."

"It shall not be, if we can prevent it," I said, trying to reassure her.

"Do not go, Gerald !" she cried, catching hold of my hand. "What does it matter, since every one is safe ? Let it burn !"

"My dear Hester, do you take me for a coward or a fool ?" I asked. "Much of your property may be saved ; I must be on

the spot to sanction any necessary measures in your name."

She let go my hand instantly, and drew back. I rushed round to the stable, and in two minutes was tearing along the hard high road. The lurid light loomed brighter and larger as I caught it at successive turns and windings of the road. When I reached the house flames were bursting out of the windows of the gallery which runs the length of the upper storey of the west wing. From the midst of an excited throng Miss Hampson ran towards me. By the blaze of the flames I saw that she was pale, trembling, and in tears.

"You will never be able to forgive me!" she cried. "I must have been remiss, or the fire could not have spread so fast unnoticed."

"My dear madam, do not distress your-

self; you cannot alter the course of the wind," I said. "Only tell me if there is anything in these rooms that Hester particularly values."

"If there is, it is in flames!" she groaned, wringing her hands.

"No, no; the back rooms might be entered with a ladder. Bring the tallest ladder you can find, men," I cried; "and all the pails you can get."

A dozen volunteers instantly flew in search of the articles required.

"The rest present, both men and women, form into lines down to the lake, and pass water up, to fling upon the spot where the west wing joins the front of the house."

Poor Miss Hampson was the first to place herself. The lake was only some fifty paces from the west wing, and volunteers were increasing by scores every ten minutes. A

fire at the principal mansion in the neighbourhood is not a festival that occurs every day in country places. Pails and ladders were brought. I set the butler and steward in command of my ranks, distributed the pails at intervals, and chose the largest ladder.

“Miss Hampson,” I asked, “where would anything valuable be found in these rooms?”

“Hester’s strong box is in her dressing-room, the third and fourth windows to the right at the back. But do not do anything so rash——”

I cut her short by rushing round, with two or three men I knew to be trustworthy, to the back of the west wing. We placed the ladder against the windows pointed out, entered the room without any difficulty, and rescued the strong-box and a large Indian casket, which looked like a jewel case. As

two of us handed them through the casements to the others on the ladder, flames began to crackle loudly, and in ominous nearness, and smoke forced its way under the door. I knew nothing of the geography of this upper storey, and had no idea if there was anything else which Hester valued that we could save; so we all made the best of our way to join the volunteers who were trying manfully to extinguish the fire with pailfuls of water thrown on at intervals of minutes; a mockery of weapons against so strong a foe. No engines had appeared. Dense smoke began to drive towards us in blinding clouds; flames belched forth from one window after another; one moment all surrounding objects were lit by a fierce and lurid light, the next all was veiled in deep obscurity. Time went on, minutes appearing hours; and our efforts seemed but to



feed the flames. More than once a heavy detonation, like the sound of powerful cannon firing, shook the air; it was the falling in of portions of the flooring. Sparks, embers, and fragments of glass fell about us in perilous showers. The heat began to be almost unendurable.

As I was becoming frantic at their non-appearance the engines came, leaping along like living creatures eager to join the fray. Streams of water were discharged upon the burning mass, seething furiously, and sending forth blinding jets of steam. Two hours elapsed before the flames were got under. The interval appears to me to have been a Pandemonium of blazing fire, of hissing torrents, of burning heat, of the noise of falling chimneys and rafters, and of the Babel of excited and clamouring tongues. When the last cascade had ex-

tinguished the last feeble smouldering sparks, there was only the shell of the west wing standing, all scarred, smoking, black, and deluged with water. A carriage and cart were got ready, and Miss Hampson and I made the best of our way home with the few valuables that we had been able to save. It was three in the morning when we arrived at the Grange; but the lamp burnt dimly in the hall, and Hester, pale and eager, came running out to meet us. She drew me into the library, where lights were burning, her hands clasping my arm tightly, her eyes fastened upon my face.

"Oh! Gerald!" she cried, "your hair is singed, and your coat sleeve is burnt!"

She looked so truly horrified that I laughed.

"I am all right," I said; "but I have brought home very poor spoils, Hester."

"You are not hurt, then?" she cried.

"Most ingloriously whole," I answered, half sorry for my immunity.

At this juncture Miss Hampson bustled in, staggering under the weight of the jewel box.

"He has behaved like a hero," said this good old goose. "He rescued the valuables in your dressing-room out of the very flames." She fussed out again to give directions about the disposition of the strong-box.

Hester looked up in my face, her eyes positively brimming over.

"How can I ever thank you enough?" she said.

Words were on the very tip of my tongue: there was a way in which the spirit moved me to suggest that she might requite me, but I stopped them on my lips.

If my wife's kisses were ever to be mine, I would receive them as the testimony of love, not as wages asked for services performed.

"You have nothing to thank me for," I said. "What is anything I have attempted to do to-night, to all you have done for me and mine?"


"I do not keep a debtor and creditor account," she said, leaving her hold of my arm, and drawing back coldly. I was chilled instantly.

Ah! if women only knew their true power.

Were Hester always eager and caressing as when she came out to meet me last night, I would not answer for any other woman's hold on my heart; such is the power of propinquity, so fascinating is the show of interest to the impressionable male

mind. This morning she has been what she always is after being betrayed into any manifestation of warmth—rather cooler, rather more silent, rather more subdued than usual.

*Nov. 23rd.*—It seems that our destiny means to fix us at the Grange. Hester wrote to my mother by the first post yesterday, thinking it right to ask her sanction to our remaining here for a day or two longer, until we could make fresh arrangements; for all the inhabitable part of Allingham is effectually gutted. Only the east wing, the offices, and the dreary, vast, awful reception rooms in the front are left standing. My mother wrote by return of post, to beg us to remain here as long as it might suit our convenience; and hinting that it was more than probable that she would give up the Grange to us altogether.



She seems delighted with my aunt's society, and all the circumstances of her surroundings. May her satisfaction only last!

This afternoon, as we were going out, one of the footmen came to tell Hester that a person wanted to speak to her.

"Show the person in," she said.

A man entered, whom I speedily discovered to be the servant whose duty it was to superintend the flues at Allingham. He came, full of penitence and lamentations, to beg that his mistress would forgive him.

She granted her pardon very freely, and then, evidently emboldened by such unexpected clemency, he asked, with considerable hesitation, if she would allow him to remain at Allingham a day or two longer, as he had no friends in this part of the country.

"And where are you thinking of

going at the end of the day or two?" she inquired, with a kind of blunt yet not undignified freedom, which I have often remarked in her manner to her inferiors.

"Well, I thought, ma'am—my lady—since you are so good you would, perhaps, not object to give me a character, and say all you can for me. I have heard of another situation, 'cause I knew your ladyship would never think of keeping me after what has happened——"

"And why not?" she interrupted. "After the warning you have had, I should imagine that I might more safely entrust the care of my flues—when I have any—to you than to any other person."

He was touched, even to tears, and went away, saying, in a broken voice, "that there never was a lady like her."

We took our way, half an hour later, by

a short cut across the fields to Allingham, for Hester had not yet seen the wreck of her property. I spoke little as we went, for my mind was occupied with the subject which has engrossed it very constantly of late, Hester's singular character. The magnanimity with which she bore so heavy a loss astonished me. I was not prepared for so great a degree of disinterestedness, although I had often observed a splendid disregard of lucre in all her dealings, not only in great things, but in small; a much more marvellous trait, I fancy, in her sex. Women can often be grandly generous, if seldom perfectly just.

It struck me suddenly that I missed the light touch of her hand upon my arm; it had become a habit for her to accept my arm in these daily wanderings. I looked down to remind her of the omission; she



was glancing up at me with me that intent, absorbed glance which I have noticed her more than once directing at my face.

“Take my arm, Hester,” I said. She started, and took it. “Were you thinking what a stupid, silent, self-occupied companion you had got?”

“No,” she said, colouring.

“Not thinking about me at all, I dare say?” I suggested, a little piqued.

“I did not say that,” she answered. But she would not tell me what her thoughts had been, although I teased her to do so. She said, colouring still more, “that she could not.”

“Well, I will be more confiding; mine were occupied with you. I was thinking that your servant’s estimate of your character was not a mistaken one. I am of opinion too ‘that there never was any one like you.’”

"Did you think I did wrong?" she asked, eagerly.

"I think you never do wrong."

"Ah! now you are merely complimentary. I like the truth."

"I always speak the truth, madam. I have not given you much reason to think that my civility overpowers my sincerity, I am afraid."

"No," she said, smiling a little, "but you are so generous and impulsive, Gerald, that I fear you may come to think as much too highly of me now, as you once thought too meanly. What I should like, is for you to know me and judge me rightly, without too much indulgence, or too little. You must not always give me credit for amiability because I do not express displeasure; I am passionate enough, but it is my nature also to suppress my feelings, as it is yours to give words to them."

I saw that she spoke with the utmost simplicity and single-mindedness, eager only to disabuse my mind of the idea that she was less faulty than her neighbours. But her words contained the keenest reproof to me, conscious of my many shortcomings, faults not only of omission, but of commission, against her.

“Yes, we are indeed different!” I said, impetuously. “You have all the wisdom, all the magnanimity, all the self-restraint, all the unselfishness, in which I am so fearfully deficient. Instead of having a husband who can support and guide you, you have married a weak-minded, purposeless fool.”

She had been too much astonished at the warmth of my outburst to interrupt me at first, but here she broke in, hastily—

“Hush! hush!” she said; “when you

condemn yourself, you do discredit to me."

"I know how forgiving and how generous you can be," I said, sadly; "and there again is a striking instance of my inferiority. I should have felt more inclined to kick than to forgive the careless dolt whom you pardoned so freely this afternoon."

"I don't quite see how I could have adopted the former course, therefore the latter seemed the only one open to me. But, speaking seriously, the present case is one in point. I do not want you to think my motive too amiable. I have said to you before, and I always mean what I say, Gerald, that I do not care for Allingham. I have no associations to make its very stones dear to me, as those of the Grange are to you; and I care as little for the loss

of the money we shall have to spend, I suppose, in rebuilding it. Besides, I seriously think that I have secured, by keeping Gray, a servant who will never serve me again with mere eye-service."

"You try to make your goodness appear a mere matter of expediency; but I see why your dependents give you such thorough as well as such willing service. My mother is a good mistress; but she dispenses her kind offices and her commands from a very serene height—it is patronage; and the sense that she is so much the superior is the strongest bond and spring of her charities."


"Perhaps, then, you may sometimes think me undignified; but I do not look upon the matter at all in that light. I think service is an affair of conscience to both parties alike, a business, contract in

which an equivalent is given for benefits received. But then it seems to me also that the rule, not to look only upon our own things, but to look also upon the things of others, steps in to make us mutually helpful, in this case, as in all others. You see I am not an aristocrat, Gerald, like you; and so I look upon these matters with the eye of a woman of the people; your mother's view is the remnant of a lingering feudalism, good and beautiful too when the person who professes it is as kind and upright as she is; but dangerous beyond measure in the case of a vulgar, mean, or selfish nature."

I assented warmly. It gave me twofold pleasure to hear her speak so freely. It rejoiced me as much to know that she could be sufficiently at ease with me to discuss her feelings—she who had been formerly so shy,

so silent, so reserved, as to find that the views themselves were so just and so noble.

As we talked we had arrived at the gates of Allingham. From the midst of the ruins a gentleman stepped forward to greet us, who was received by Hester with much cordiality. She introduced him as Mr. Jerningham, and I recognised the name of the famous architect who had built Allingham. She had written to tell him of the catastrophe, and to request his advice, and he had come to view the extent of the mischief done before presenting himself at the Grange. We went together over the whole scene of the fire, and Mr. Jerningham then returned with us. He seems a most pleasant, polished, cultivated fellow, more than middle-aged, but with all the verve and freshness of youth, full of strange theories and out of the way information ; and bring-



ing his views and his knowledge to bear on his profession in a manner which proves him a person of as much practical talent as originality. He is to remain with us for some days, so that the restoration may be discussed at full leisure.







## CHAPTER VI.

GERALD MARLOWE'S DIARY (*continued*).

*Nov. 27th.*—When we came home this afternoon I found Mr. Wynn's card upon the table. The servant said that he had expressed great dissatisfaction at finding us both out. I cannot say that I partake of his regret; anything that reminds me of my green folly and infatuation chafes and galls me beyond expression. I had been foolish enough to hope that the distance which divides us from Combermere might be sufficient, under the circumstances, to preclude the necessity of calling. That we might be likely to meet the Wynns occasionally at my uncle's I always knew. But Hester and

my aunt are not really friendly, and do no more than keep up a decent interchange of visits, and I do not imagine that the dull routine of the secluded life their means constrain them to lead at the Rectory will make the society of her family very attractive to Florence, changed as she now is.

But Wynn, at least, is evidently determined we shall be intimate ; for it was our place to have called first upon them. Of course he has no idea that we need be anything but loving cousins. I wish he was a less hearty and demonstrative individual ; or that Heaven had induced him to invest his money in some remote part of the globe—say Nova Zembla. Hester made no remark upon his visit, but perhaps that was hardly to be wondered at, as Miss Hampson and Mr. Jerningham were both with us. I perceive that we shall have to go and see

the Wynns, and I never can feel anything but a dupe and a fool in Florence's fascinating presence. If she had told her husband of our past passages I think I should have less hesitation in meeting both her and him.

*Dec. 1st.*—Mr. Jerningham has been here since the 23rd, to the general satisfaction. Everything is already in train for the speedy restoration of Allingham. We have visited it almost every day during his stay. I think if Heaven had pleased to endue me with the brain of a designer and the hand of a skilful draughtsman—neither of which necessary qualifications have fallen to my lot—that I should have liked the profession of an architect as well as any, except my early dream, the Engineers, and my father and mother would never have consented to my valuable life being imperilled in the

army. Certainly a profession, even a business, must be an inestimable boon to a man. An occupation in which we can take pleasure and feel of use in the world must be enough of itself to prevent a man's life being miserable. Mr. Jerningham is so great an enthusiast for his art that he has infected me; and to such a degree that I am beginning even to take an interest in the rebuilding of Allingham. Our united efforts have made several improvements in details. One of the biggest, barest, and most out of the way of the rooms in the west wing is to be cut into two; one is to be Hester's boudoir, the other my *study*—falsely so called (I have not read a line for months—the papers excepted—but some novel or pamphlet to my father). I have not been in so settled or serene a frame of mind as to be able to find that calm delight in reading

which is necessary for the enjoyment of any study, but which Campbell so egregiously names as the epithet proper to describe the passion of love, and that between two very stormy individuals.

The plans of the house had all been saved in Hester's strong box. While we were discussing them with Mr. Jerningham, one incident happened which might have threatened stormy weather in past days. The room, or half room, proposed for my especial den, is in the middle of the west wing, and opens out into the garden; it would have no entrance except through the half devoted to Hester's occupation. Mr. Jerningham asked me jokingly, whether I should not find the vicinity of my wife and her friends rather too attractive for the neighbourhood of a study.

"A passage could be cut off both rooms,

and entrance might be given to them in that way, instead of making the only communication with the outer world through the door of Lady Marlowe's room."

I saw an expression I thought I understood on Hester's face. She looked at once confused and constrained, as she used to look in old days when suspected of being too friendly with me; but it was now because she remembered my churlish conduct about the den in Grosvenor Square.

"I am perfectly satisfied as it is," I said, hastily.

Her countenance cleared miraculously.

"There is a very nice quiet little room at the very end of the long corridor leading into the grounds," she whispered, her eyes bright with mischief.

"If they"—Mr. Jerningham and Miss Hampson—"were not present, you should

repent your cruelty and audacity," I answered, in still lower tones.

She coloured vividly and smiled, a teasing secure smile, at once defiant and provocative.

*Dec. 2nd.*—Mr. Jerningham left us to-day, already terribly in arrears with the rest of the world. He will only be able to give us flying visits for the future, he tells us, and that is all that is now necessary for business purposes. It is well that the progress of the works promises to be so rapid, for my mother begins to show symptoms of cooling, as I had expected. She has complained more than once that my aunt likes hot rooms, and she likes airy ones; that my aunt likes late hours, and she likes early ones; the last charge is more weighty; that my aunt and her set are not at all of accord with her on the most important

topics; not serious persons, but mere fashionable worldlings.

*Dec. 7th.*—I find we are becoming people of importance. For the last week or two we have been inundated with callers; the county has taken advantage of the catastrophe at Allingham to make those visits which our recent troubles and loss have prevented them paying before upon our marriage. They come early and late, as units and as groups; those who are particularly anxious to catch us at home calling directly after luncheon, which has more than once detained us, to my exceeding rage, at home all the afternoon. Once caught, succeeding streams give us no opportunity of escaping from the rush. To-day I individually awoke to find myself famous, and the revelation was marvellous to me. Early this morning a deputation of



the members of the Midlandshire Hunt presented themselves in solemn conclave in the library, to inform me that Sir William Acton was going to give up the Hounds at Easter, and to ask me to undertake the duties of Master in his room. I thanked them, I hope properly, for the unexpected honour, but I declined it, telling them frankly the reason, that my means would not permit me so great an annual outlay, much as I should have liked the post. They seemed astonished, but of course accepted the decision. I wish to Heaven I were not a pauper lordling, and for even more weighty reasons than because I regret to have to decline the first public compliment paid me by the men of my own county.

I decided that I must tell Hester of the affair; as it appears to have been matter of

public discussion, she is certain to hear of it, else I certainly should have kept the honour to myself. The question of money is always a stumbling-block between us. Directly she heard of the offer she interrupted me, with evident delight.

"How convenient that it should have been made just now!" she cried. "There is lots of room for building kennels and anything else that is wanted at the back of the east wing at Allingham. Let us telegraph to Mr. Jerningham, he will help us to make plans. How I shall like to see you Master of the Hounds!"

I hardly knew how to tell her that her kind and eager joy was wasted.

"I have declined, my dear Hester," I said.

"Declined!" she cried, her face falling.  
"But why, Gerald?"

"You will be hurt, I fear, if I say it is because I cannot afford it," I said, gently.

Her brow grew dark.

"Oh, how unkind!" she said, evidently seriously vexed and offended.

"Nay, listen to me," I said, taking her hand, which she tried to withdraw, but which I held firmly in mine. "If it were for anything that you could take pleasure in too, my dear wife, I should think it unpardonable to have refused it without asking your opinion on the subject. But, thank Heaven, you are no Diana, Hester, and this would spend thousands in a way which would give neither of us any additional pleasure. I shall hunt, as I have always done, but I cannot in my circumstances consent to be Master of the Hounds."

She answered me not a word, her face

was turned away from me ; I put my arm round her waist, and drew her towards me. She tried to elude the caress at first, but I implored her to look at me and listen to me, and she heard me at first silently and displeased. But I argued the point with much eager and anxious iteration ; at last she smiled, but averted her head to try and conceal the smile.

“ Ah ! Gerald, you have the art to make the worse almost appear the better cause. But I am not the least convinced,” she said.

“ But you have forgiven me,” I said ; “ you know, darling, that I did not mean to be unkind.”

She would not give me her forgiveness in words, but she let me kiss her again and again, and she has been perfectly kind and sweet since.

I have a keen and delightful suspicion

that my wife is less indifferent to me than she would care to own, even to herself.

*Dec. 11th.*—We are now within a fortnight of Christmas Day ; how different a one to my last ! Then, outward things seemed to be infinitely brighter, for we were a united family, and had not the terrible sense of recent loss to chill and sadden us ; but the recent catastrophe of my love filled me with the bitter, burning rage of slighted passion, harder to bear than any Heaven-inflicted calamity. Now, except for the fact that Miss Hampson occupies the third chair instead of my mother, I could sometimes fancy the past two sad months a dream. It is not that I forget my father ; his memory is so ever present with me that it seems sometimes as if he might be with us at any moment. It is as it used to be in his rare and hasty absences from home ; I

look to hear his step, his voice, to see his dear familiar face at any time. It is terrible to recollect that this can never be again. Such an awakening brings back all the bitterness of the first agony of desolation. But although no one who has loved the dead truly can ever forget, it is true that time takes the first poignant sharpness of the sting from bereavement, although the sense of abiding loss remains.

I braced up my nerves to propose calling upon the Wynns yesterday. Hester made no opposition, and we went, but they were out, thank Heaven! The stream of visitors has ceased to flow so continuously, and Hester and I are falling again into our old tête-à-tête life. Miss Hampson is as little restraint as possible upon us; she has her own rooms, and finds plenty of occupation and amusement in visiting and receiving

her friends of all ranks, and their name is legion, for she is the most sociable, cheerful, gregarious of good old souls. At meal-times, and in the evening, she is always with us. She seems perfectly happy, but I think the mere sense that she is under Hester's roof would make her that at any time. And Hester treats her with a regard and consideration, the fruit of affection and respect, which it is very pretty to see.

*Dec. 20th.*—I have heard two pieces of news to-day which have put me out not a little, although I have no earthly right to be disturbed or displeased at either. Mr. Wynn has accepted the post of Master of the Hounds; and my mother writes us word that she has quite made up her mind to return to the Grange at the beginning of the New Year. She begs us to remain until Allingham is ready for our reception;

but that we both see to be quite out of the question. We have already lived far longer than I like under another person's roof. We must decide at once upon our future movements, and have some plan ready to meet my mother's arguments against our leaving her.

*Dec. 21st.*—Hester is certainly the most extraordinary of women. I am sure there never has been a character made up of so many contradictions; and it is not likely that there ever will be such another. She is tender and yet cold, kind and yet repellent, frank and yet reserved. If I did not go very near loving her, I should feel sometimes as if I hated her. I see all her excellences; but the knowledge of her one great want chills my sense of them. I own that I behaved like a churlish, ungrateful, and cold-hearted wretch, for



months after I married her. If I could live that first six months over again, Heaven only knows how gladly I would do it. I would do more. I could be capable, fifty times a day, of humiliating myself in the dust before her, if I thought her able even to understand the greatness of the sacrifice I should be making. But the fear that she lacks heart either to see or comprehend holds me back.

For months past I have tried to show by tacit means, my change of feeling towards her. I have been as attentive as the most devoted lover, as complaisant as the fondest husband, and as demonstrative as I dared. And she is complaisant too, hang it! She is always "unco ceevil," "senselessly ceevil," to use the epithet of Dean Ramsay's most delightful of Scotch lassies. She receives all I give; but she gives nothing. She is no

more caressing now than on the day of our luckless, loveless marriage. Her lips never meet mine ; her hand never replies to the clasp of mine. 'She smiles occasionally, sometimes her colour rises slightly ; but for these faint testimonies to her being flesh and blood, she might be made of marble. Never, except during the sympathy of our first grief for my father, has she made the least advance to me, even to touching my hand. I suppose she is one of those women who, kind and excellent, and even tender, are insensible by nature to the passion of love. I would give half her excellences to know that she were not thus insensate. Or is it that it is I who have not the power to touch her heart ?

I do not imagine that I was ever a coxcomb ; but I never thought that I should be cursed with powerlessness to gain the

affection of any woman. It can hardly be a chance coincidence, that the girl who vowed to love me always, the woman who has actually married me, should show their indifference to me so plainly.

*Dec. 26th.*—I have been getting ill-tempered lately. Hester's coldness irritates me sometimes beyond expression, though I take good care to suppress my rage. I have no desire to appear to her in the light of the despairing complaining lover. "Will if looking well can't move her, looking ill prevail?" It is easy to jest; it would always be my nature rather to sneer than to lament. But I am certain I cannot stand this much longer. I have been patient for a good while now, and I don't know that endurance was ever my forte.

To-day we were discussing our plans. Hester did not seem to have any ideas

beyond the conviction that it was impossible to go to town at this time of the year; in which I agreed only so far, that I think London rather less objectionable in winter than at any other season. I proposed two or three places, and she acceded to each in turn; until, on further discussion, we found something unfeasible in each suggestion; and then she agreed as readily to the objection. Either there would be difficulties in getting houses large enough to contain us, and the detestable tribe whom it seems necessary we should take everywhere with us; or else the winter was too cold at each place, or too damp.

At last I mentioned Brighton, saying that I have always had an affectionate remembrance of "kind, merry, cheerful Doctor Brighton."

"What is it?" asked Hester.

"I went there once with my mother, after one of my many juvenile illnesses.

"We left Hexham in the beginning of February; the country was as dreary, as dismal, as the country always is when winter is going, and spring has not come; not a glimmer of sunshine had cheered us for weeks.

"We got to Brighton after dark; and the journey tired me so that I slept well, and late into the morning—a thing I had not done for months. I jumped up directly I woke, to look out and see into what kind of strange new world they had brought me, for it was my first visit to the coast, and I had heard and dreamt wonders of the sea.

"We were on the cliff, towards the Kemp Town end. Before me stretched the sea, quivering and glittering silvery bright, bathed in a flood of sunlight. The Chain

Pier, alive with gay groups, lay in front of us; a stream of carriages and pedestrians seemed to go past like a brilliant, ever-changing, ever-flowing tide. I got better from that very hour."

"Oh, let us go to Brighton!" cried Hester.

But she had said the same thing to every proposition I had suggested; and so her eagerness did not particularly touch or impress me in this instance.

"What a patient Griselda I have got for a wife! Have you no will of your own, Hester?" I asked, half amused, half vexed.

"I really don't care, for myself, where we go," she said, laughing. "Would you have me make objections for the sake of objecting, when I have positively no preference in the matter?"

"Is it that you are willing to go wher-

ever I go?" I asked, fired by sudden courage.

"I do not think that that is a question you ought to ask me," she said, hastily, the laughter and light all dying out of her eyes, and the merry happy ring leaving her voice.

Certainly she is either the coldest or the most implacable of women.





## CHAPTER VII.

### MISS HAMPSON'S DIARY.

*The Grange, Dec. 27th.* — Fate is certainly cruel to my poor Hester; she pursues her inexorably, and has cut off from her the power of escaping. Lately I have been happy, for we have had a peacefully serene life. I have withdrawn myself as much as possible from the society of Hester and her husband, holding that a third person as inmate of a married couple's house is a mistake. But I have not failed to observe with delight that those two in whom I am so deeply interested were beginning to understand each other better, and to feel more "at home" together.



To-day as they were discussing after luncheon the arrangements necessary for our visit to Brighton, Mr. and Mrs. Wynn were announced. Florence sailed in, beautiful, graceful, and gracious, as ever; her husband followed in her wake, in striking contrast—big, red-faced, loud-voiced, the rich parvenu to the finger tips. He is hearty enough, though, and is evidently anxious to be on the best terms with his wife's relations. Mrs. Wynn kissed first Hester, then me, and shook hands with her cousin, murmuring some expression of condolence upon his recent loss. Mr. Wynn, blunt and bluff, wrung the hands of all three, but made no attempt at sympathy. A scarlet spot had risen on both of Hester's cheeks; Lord Marlowe looked as pale, as quiet, as grave, as usual.

They seated themselves, and then ensued

lamentations over the catastrophe at Allingham, and inquiries after the Dowager Lady Marlowe.

"She is quite well," said Hester; "she is coming home next week."

Florence laughed, her peculiarly gay, ringing laugh, which has nothing harsh or unpleasant in its merriment. By so silvery a voice any man would love to be rallied; and few women could resist the contagion of its charm.

"I thought that would be it. And do you stay here?"

"Oh no! except just to welcome her. I think we have made quite a sufficient visitation."

"Where are you going?" inquired Florence, her fair face wearing that expression of interest which it is easy to her facile nature to assume, and which the rest of the

world find so winning and so gracious. I do not think that there is the least touch of the hypocrite in her disposition ; for the time she feels sincerely what she gives us to understand she feels.

"I believe we are going to Brighton," said Hester.

"To Brighton at this time of year ! Come to us till Allingham is ready."

Mr. Wynn joined warmly in his wife's invitation ; the countenance of Lord and Lady Marlowe expressed but little eagerness for the visit. He said nothing, but he looked at Hester ; she murmured "that they were very kind, and that Lady Marlowe had urged them to attend to it, but that

her own plan. "If it were November, now.—Oh! you must come! Gerald, persuade your wife. You did not use to be obstinate and disagreeable."

"I never interfere in domestic matters," he said, with gravity. "Hester has quite settled, I believe, that we go to Brighton."

Hester looked piqued, but said nothing.

"You will never be able to endure it!" cried Mrs. Wynn, elevating her eyebrows.

"In the spring it will be odious."

I smiled to myself. Not two years ago, the prospect of a week at Brighton, even in July, would have opened a vista of delights to the daughter of the Rector of Hexham. The same day, I am sure, struck Lord Mar's smile hovered round

people," he

"Oh, I see it is no use talking to you!" cried Florence, nettled, and turning to Hester. "Do come, Lady Marlowe. John, persuade her. You will not be so unkind as to refuse."

"Thank you," said Hester, very much embarrassed. "I really do not think we ought."

She glanced at her husband; he got up and walked to the window.

"We shall have no visitors; we will be perfectly quiet. Do! You see *she* would come, Gerald," urged Florence.

"I do not understand or care for the etiquette of these matters," he said, turning round after an awkward pause, his voice harsh, his manner curt. "Hester and you must settle it."

Hester drew herself up; his tone jarred upon her as it did upon me. "You are

very kind," she repeated, helplessly, evidently uncertain what to do, whether he wished her to accept or to refuse.

"Then you will come," cried Florence, taking the expression of courtesy for consent. "Don't look at your husband, but say that you will come."

Pressed thus hardly, she consented; Florence called her a darling, and extended her invitation to me. I accepted, like Hester, lamely enough, but Mrs. Wynn was too triumphant at the success of her plan to notice shades of manner. All that she cared for was to gain her own way. She was quite ready to accept consent for alacrity. They stayed only a few minutes longer; as Florence shook hands with Hester, she asked what day she might expect them.

"We must stay to receive my mother,"


said Lord Marlowe, as Hester, hesitating, glanced at him.

“The day after she comes, then, Friday?”

No demur was made, and the visitors left the room. As Lord Marlowe accompanied them to the porch, I, standing near the door, saw Mrs. Wynn look up in his face, and heard her say plaintively, “you *used* not to be a bear, Gerald.”

“I am afraid you will find me a good deal altered from what I was when I had the honour of knowing you intimately. Times change, and we change with them, as the Latin adage has it.”

Florence frowned as she stepped into the porch, but a smile lurked in her eyes. Hester, looking out of the window to see the guests drive away, was too far off to hear either complaint or retort, but they set me musing. I do not think Florence



means harm, but she may do not the less—but the more—for not having the worst intentions. She is extremely vain, and has been a flirt incarnate from her babyhood. She has, no doubt, a real liking for her cousin; it pains her sincerely to be unreconciled to him. But enmity is safer than amity where a man and woman have stood upon the terms which these two once occupied to each other, and I trust that I may never see them friends.

*Jan. 7th.*—We are at Combermere. Lady Marlowe returned home the day before yesterday, and we arrived here last night in time for dinner. Lady Marlowe was evidently as unwilling that her son should be his cousin's guest as I can be. She even asked me, in her curtest manner, "how this precious plan came to be made."



“Mrs. Wynn came over and pressed it so urgently that Hester gave way.”

The dowager said no more, but her face did not lose its troubled look while we remained at the Grange.

Mrs. Wynn is evidently delighted to have us, and to exhibit herself in her new rôle of matron and mistress of a large establishment. I am not overwhelmed at the spectacle. I rather find myself constantly wondering at the difference of the atmosphere under very similar conditions to those to which I have been accustomed at Allingham. That is also a large establishment; there, too, the mistress is young. Here the guiding presence of a kind but firm head is absent. There generous yet judicious hands hold the purse strings. Here all is luxury and profusion, yet none of the comfort and elegance every detail exhibits there. Here

there are troops of menials, yet indifferent attendance; French cooks, and cookery that is far from infallible. At Allingham every one knows his or her place, and fills it. Mr. Wynn is extravagantly hospitable; Florence is as impulsively kind and bright as ever; but the thoughtful grace and freedom which make Allingham a real home is wanting here. There is too much whirl and bustle for enjoyment.

*Jan. 12th.*—There are no other visitors yet, but I fancy that Mrs. Wynn will not be able long to endure our present quietude. She, and I, and Hester spend long days alone, for the gentlemen either hunt or shoot every day. Mrs. Wynn often follows the hounds herself, but she cannot, of course, leave her guests now. I, who know Hester so well, see that she does not take to Mrs. Wynn. There has always been between them that

degree of surface intimacy which subsists between young women who have known each other from childhood ; and I think that Florence begins now to be sincerely anxious that there should be more. She is too well pleased with her fascinating self to fear rivalry of any kind from Hester. But I divine that Hester is far too diffident of her own charms to be able to look with impartial eyes upon the attractions of a woman as bountifully endowed as Mrs. Wynn. Women who have no beauty invariably overrate most signally the power of mere physical gifts. The women who have swayed with most lasting and powerful empire the hearts of men have not been by any means the most lovely. I was a pretty girl myself once, and no girl, surely, had ever fewer admirers than myself. For despite the popular conviction that the lover comes

once in the lifetime of every woman, he never came to me. I do not mean to imply from what I have said above that Hester is of a jealous temper, but the circumstances here are peculiar, and she has more than a mere catalogue of beauties to fear in Mrs. Wynn. Even an old woman like myself can see in her characteristics of Pope's heroine :

" If to her share some trifling errors fall,  
Look in her face and you'll forget them all."

Hester and I have both been witnesses of his past enthrallment, and Florence has tried her fascinations more than once already upon Lord Marlowe. At present I must say that he has been impenetrable as any anchorite. I who have seen them together so often in past times wonder at the depth of his insensibility ; his, whom I have seen colour like a girl at the sound of her step or voice, and

quiver at the touch of her dress. The resentment which can thus freeze him must be indeed profound. But I fancy that at present his coldness rather flatters than piques Mrs. Wynn. I have seen her smile a naughty smile at more than one display of his indifference.

*Jan. 14th.*—Certainly the young women of this generation are mightily unlike the girls of mine. They have cast off the restraints which custom and education, rightly or wrongly, then placed upon them. And in discarding prejudices and affectations, they go very far towards casting off modesty and good manners as well. They give utterance to ideas we should have blushed for entertaining; and their want of reticence does not only include astonishing revelations of their own opinions and feelings, but takes no regard of those of others.

To-day Mrs. Wynn, Hester, and myself went out upon the steps to see Lord Marlowe and our host start for the hunting-field. Both were well mounted, and clad in scarlet, and I thought I had never seen so strong an instance of the powerlessness of words to convey any real idea of outward things. The same epithets might have been used, with the utmost accuracy, to describe the appearance of both gentlemen. Both are good horsemen, both are young, both are fair-complexioned, light-haired, and above middle height. But yet there is not mere dissimilarity, there is absolute contrast, conveyed to the eye travelling from one to the other. Lord Marlowe's hair is golden-brown, and curls in wavy rings; Mr. Wynn's is reddish, and straight, and coarse as tow. Lord Marlowe's features

are regular and refined ; Mr. Wynn's are blunt and wide. Lord Marlowe's complexion is of that clear paleness which conveys the idea of distinction rather than of delicacy ; Mr. Wynn's is of a brickdust-red by nature, and bears the evidence that his life has been too free. Lord Marlowe's frame is tall, slight, and graceful, as well as agile ; Mr. Wynn is extremely broad-shouldered, stout, and thickset.

I am no leveller ; no preacher of the new-fangled doctrines which maintain that blood is valueless. I am of opinion that in beauty (as a mere question of colour and form) as in intellect and in endurance, the parvenu may sometimes equal the aristocrat. But I am sure that breeding gives points which tell in man as well as in beast. In spirit, in grace, in perfection of outline and details, in carriage and manner, the

patrician is unmistakeable, and bears away the bell.

Mr. Wynn looks what he is—the rich, prosperous son of a navvy. Lord Marlowe looks what he is—the scion of a long-descended historic house. Florence observed the two for some moments in silence, her bright, quick, comprehensive gaze turning first to one and then to the other; then she glanced suddenly at Hester, whose eyes were fixed upon Lord Marlowe.

“You are admiring your hero!” said Florence, laughing lightly at Hester’s absorbed face. She started, and coloured crimson, glancing at Mrs. Wynn with indignation.

“Oh, don’t blush! and pray don’t mind me,” cried Florence. “I can excuse you; you know he used to be my hero too, once. There is rather a difference between the



man I married and the man I ought to have married, is there not? As great as there is between the plain monosyllables John Wynn, and the euphonious title of Gerald Reginald Fitzgerald, Viscount Marlowe."

"I shall make you no answer," said Hester, unable to forbear smiling a little, despite herself. "I could never hope to emulate your frankness."

She turned away, and was walking into the house, her face wearing an expression at once proud and annoyed.

"Don't be angry!" cried Florence, interrupting her retreat skilfully. "I was afraid I had vexed you, though I am sure I don't know why. You are one of those queer, quiet creatures that one may know for years, and yet not be able to fathom. But if you understand me, you

don't like me, even half as well as I like you."

"There is nothing whatever mysterious about me ; I am a very commonplace person," said Hester, evading the question of likes. "It is only that I do not wear my heart upon my sleeve, as you do, Mrs. Wynn."

"There you are mistaken ; I haven't got one at all, which is far the best way ; it saves one an infinity of pains and worries."

"I had no idea you were a being so deserving of pity," said Hester, amused, yet scornful. "It seems to me that you have everything that the world prizes most highly."

As she spoke, her glance had fallen upon the approaching figure of the fine lady nurse, who was bearing in her arms the little son and heir, heavily wrapped in his

gorgeously embroidered robes. His mother took him from the nurse; he was half-asleep, and resented being disturbed most mightily. Florence looked a lovely, brilliant picture, as she stood in the bright sunlight, the white draperies of the infant contrasting picturesquely with the deep mourning of the dress which set off to such perfection her vivid complexion and shining rippled hair. She looked too slight, too young, for maternity; she did not suggest that ideal which is so touching that, depicted in its highest type, it has thrilled and ruled the heart of Christendom for eighteen centuries; she conveyed rather the notion of some fair young girl playing at motherhood. I who, though an old maid, have been used to children since the days when, as a little girl of eight, I nursed my smaller brothers and sisters in my father's

poor parsonage, saw that Florence's arms held the tiny form unskilfully, not with that deft, maternal clasp, which comes to so many women by instinct.

The baby evidently did not approve of his mother's style of nursing; he would not be quieted. Hester stretched out her arms to take him, as it were involuntarily.

"Here, you may have him!" said Mrs. Wynn, impatiently. "I can never do anything with him — tiresome little fellow!"

Hester's arms received him instantly; she clasped him gently yet closely, his head nestled against her breast, and rocked him softly backwards and forwards. She was not a lovely picture, like Florence, standing thus, yet she was transfigured with a touching interest, more sacred than beauty; in her face shone the glory of that

instinctive, self-forgetting, protecting love, which is a religion in the hearts of the noblest and tenderest type of woman. Her figure, more the matron's than the girl's, seemed the very ideal of ripe and gracious motherhood. It seemed that we saw her now, her arms thus filled, in the character most natural and most becoming to her. I have often noticed how invariably children take to Hester. Their innocent instincts are wiser than the blunt perceptions of grown mankind; the beauty that is not of the heart has little attraction for them; they make no mistakes. *They* never pick up the sham gem, when the priceless jewel is at their feet. The little fretful cry ceased almost directly Hester took the child. Mrs. Wynn looked at her with wonder and a little pique in her bright eyes.

“What a pity you have no child!”

she said, involuntarily ; then colouring, she stopped abruptly.

The nurse, less quick, pursued the theme. "Dear me ! I quite thought her ladyship must have been used to a family !"

Hester got very red as she bent over the child for an instant ; then she gave him back without a word. I have often wondered whether childlessness would be a trouble to my darling. I feel now, too truly I fear, how great a trial it would be to her.

The nurse went out into the park, carrying her charge for his morning airing. Mrs. Wynn took hold of Hester's arm and drew her into the morning-room. I followed them.

"I am afraid you think me a wretch, Hester. May I not call you Hester ? It used to be Miss Dombain when I was a

giddy schoolgirl, and you the lady of the manor ; but we are both matrons, and equal now. I ought to get some privilege from my dignity, for it is a great bore being married. John is so particular ; he wants me to be a regular stay-at-home, a mere tame domestic creature——”

Hester and I laughed, despite our sense of politeness, so heartily and so long, that we effectually stopped Mrs. Wynn's flow of language for the moment, and at last compelled her to join us. The idea of her even attempting the tame domestic rôle seemed too absurd.

“You see,” she pursued, as soon as we had recovered our gravity, and had reached the scene of our usual after-breakfast hours, her morning-room——“you see, men marry us for one thing, and expect to find us another. I met John at all the gaieties of

the London season. I delighted in the life, and made no secret that it charmed me. He professed to be equally delighted with me, and made no secret that I charmed him. I don't see how he can seriously imagine that the mere fact of my being married can change my character."

"I don't know," said Hester, meditatively. "I think that being married, especially being a mother, might make some women take delight in what had never pleased them before."

"Ah! some women, perhaps," said Mrs. Wynn, tossing her dainty little head; "the sort of woman whose soul is in babies. Now I daresay you will think me very dreadful. I confess frankly that I find a baby a great bore. I have never been allowed to do anything for him—not that I ever wanted to," interpolated this queer girl,



whose virtue perhaps is her frankness. "Nurses and doctors have been about him ever since he was born, and will remain so till he gets a great, rude boy, and goes to school, which event will be a blessing, no doubt. I think that I might perhaps like, in ten years' time or so, to have a little daughter, who would be a companion to me, and renew my triumphs in her turn. But this boy is made such a fuss about, it makes me quite cross. 'Baby this' and 'baby that!' I have only been married a year and a half, and already I have sunk to be the mother of the heir of all the Wynns. I used to be everything; and now I am nowhere."

Hester said nothing. I do not see how she could say anything. Mr. Wynn had certainly been violently in love with his wife when he married her, if report could


be believed; and, indeed, what else could have induced him to wed a portionless girl? Was it her fault or his if he were no longer her lover? Fortunately, Mrs. Wynn did not seem to require condolence or comment. She ran on—

“The fact is, I married when I ought to have been in the schoolroom. Early marriages are the greatest mistake that can be made. A woman must have her fling: if she does not have it before she is married, she must have it afterwards. These sentiments, the bonâ-fide, well-considered opinions of a British matron, shock you, I see. Let us go and take a walk round the conservatories, and postpone the discussion.”

*Jan. 27th.*—Last night, Mr. and Mrs. Wynn went out to dinner; it was a very grand and formal affair, at Lord ——’s;

they had been engaged for a month, and had to drive twelve miles to it.

At half-past six o'clock Florence descended to the morning room, in which Hester, her husband, and I were sitting round the fire, discussing the day's sport. The light was dim in the room, for we had no candles. As she paused in the doorway, our hostess looked rather a fairy vision than a creature of earth; more than lovely enough, I feared, to dazzle any man's eyes and heart. She wore that apology for mourning which fashion allows as a compromise to those who wish to unite the ceremony of regret with the reality of rejoicing; white, relieved with scarlet. She never wears the faint hues which many blondes consider most becoming to fair beauty—pale pinks, blues, and greens; she gives hers the radiant contrast of a brilliant background and vivid



lights. Her snowy, ethereal dress, in the very extreme of the fashion, had yet nothing, I think, at which the severest artist-eye could scoff, or rather, her appearance in it would disarm criticism. Hers is one of those dainty, piquant figures which the painter himself would love to dress in some fashionable mode. There is nothing of the ideal nymph about her; she is of the earth, earthy. I can fancy her in the powdered hair of her great-grandmother; or in the short waists and scanty skirts of her grandmother; or, farther back, in the stiff hoop and long square bodice of an earlier generation, as well as in the flowing drapery of to-day. I suppose it is only such extreme beauty which needs no adornment, and yet which you think would look lovelier in every fresh guise it could assume. I have always been an ardent admirer of every

form of beauty ; it has always been a real grief to me to think that my darling Hester would never look fair in any eyes but in the old ones to which she is the sweetest and the dearest object on which they can rest.

Mr. Wynn appeared a few moments after his wife—hot, cross, and fussy : never seen to less advantage than in the dress which suits so many men better than any other. In evening dress he seems utterly out of character ; I think he looks least ill in his hunting clothes. I can imagine that his groom's dress might even suit him better still. He hurried his wife off, and left us to spend our quiet evening together.

We had risen to take leave of our host. Lord Marlowe remained standing on the rug ; where he had stood, his eyes fixed upon the dazzling vision of his fair cousin. Hester and I sat down, one on each side of

the fire. We were silent for several minutes. Lord Marlowe kept his head bent, but a smile rose to his lips, and gradually spread over his face. He raised his head, and looked at Hester, as long and as intently as he had looked at Mrs. Wynn. She too had changed her dress, but she still wore her deep mourning for her father-in-law, a thick high silk, totally unadorned : she had neither flower nor jewel about her, and the sombre, unrelieved mass of blackness was singularly unbecoming to her dark hair and opaque complexion. To my astonishment, I saw Lord Marlowe do what I had never seen him do before. As her eyes, attracted to his by his intent gaze, met his glance with a troubled look, he stooped and kissed her.

“ I am glad my wife is not a fashionable lady,” he said, softly, his eyes gleaming

with that light I had so often seen in them in past days, but which had been absent from them for many months now. Unseen and overjoyed, I crept quietly from the room. It wanted nearly half an hour to dinner, and I had the excuse of changing my dress. As I passed the nursery door, I heard a sudden sharp scream, like the cry of a child in pain. I paused irresolute; I had never invaded yet the precincts of the grand lady nurse, though often tempted to go in and see the baby. As I hesitated, Hester came running upstairs; she, too, had heard the sound, for the nursery is directly over the morning-room.

“Something is wrong!” she said, opening the nursery door without ceremony. I followed her. The nurse was nowhere to be seen, but by a decaying fire, the baby in her lap, sat a girl I had sometimes met

carrying coals and other things to the nursery. The child was screaming violently. The girl looked heartily frightened.

"I can't think what is the matter with him. I only turned him on my lap as I was undressing him," she said.

"But I see," said Hester. "Poor dear little fellow! You have injured his arm. It is hanging powerless. Give him to me. Where is the nurse? and what business has she to leave you to do her duty?"

"She is gone out," faltered the girl. "She is always a going out, and then I puts the baby to bed, and takes care of him."

Hester turned away, disgusted beyond measure, but scorning to visit her wrath upon this girl.

"Miss Hampson, will you have the kindness to go and ask Lord Marlowe to see that



some one rides off instantly for the doctor?" she said.

I went; and he complied with her directions. Having seen the messenger off, he came upstairs with me to ask Hester whether she thought there was any necessity to send for Mr. and Mrs. Wynn.

"I do not think so," she said. "It had occurred to me, but a messenger would hardly get there more than two hours before they would be likely to come back; and it would be frightening them, I think, unnecessarily. No one can do anything but a doctor. I will stay here till Mr. and Mrs. Wynn come home."

Lord Marlowe stood still a few minutes, looking at her and at the wailing child with the helpless, pained, awe-struck glance of a man who sees suffering and is utterly powerless to assuage it. Then, unable to be of

any use, he went downstairs. The dinner-bell rang immediately, and at Hester's earnest request, I was about following him, when the housekeeper appeared, accompanied by the ladys'-maid and another of the female servants.

The girl had slunk away some time before. I suppose she had spread the news of the accident throughout the household; for the housekeeper and her satellites came up to request Lady Marlowe to go down to dinner, assuring her that she need have no scruple about leaving the baby, for that one of them would remain with him.

"You are very good," said Hester, with intense politeness, pale with indignation. "But I shall certainly decline to accept your kind offer; for some of you must have known—you, as housekeeper, ought at least to have known—that the nurse was in the

habit of leaving your master's child, night after night, to the tender mercies of a rough, ignorant young girl. I shall remain here until Mrs. Wynn returns."

I expected some insolent reply, but the women seemed cowed.

"As you please, my lady," said the housekeeper, trembling with rage, and sweeping from the room.

The other women followed her.

I went down, the dinner came up, but neither Lord Marlowe nor I could do much eating or talking. The meal over, I hastened upstairs to Hester. I found her still sitting alone and motionless, tears brimming in her eyes, as the fretful wail of pain gave place sometimes to cries of positive suffering. A few minutes afterwards we heard a loud knock at the front door. It was the doctor.

"Thank God!" said Hester.

The arm was soon seen to. It was seriously sprained, but not broken. The comparative ease produced by the skilful manipulation of the surgeon soothed the child. Hester walked up and down the room with him until she had the satisfaction of seeing him sink off into sleep. And I went downstairs, leaving her sitting by his cot.

Lord Marlowe and I passed an evening whose length only seemed equalled by its dulness. It was past twelve o'clock before the carriage returned, bringing Mr. and Mrs. Wynn. Informed of the state of affairs, he was furious; and his fury showed itself in language more expressive than elegant. He abused his wife first for her choice of a nurse, and for her neglect of the child. Then, mollified by her forbearance—for she was really concerned and shocked

—the direction of his anger changed. He rang the bell loudly to inquire if the nurse had returned. It appeared that she had come back an hour before, but that she had remained downstairs, afraid, no doubt, to encounter Hester's wrath. He ordered her to appear at once. Trembling she came in. Inquiring the amount of wages due, Mr. Wynn produced the money on the spot, and was about to turn her out, then and there, when Lord Marlowe, who had been a silent spectator hitherto, interposed, not without some contempt and indignation.

“Let her wait till to-morrow morning,” he urged. “It is too late to turn out a dog to-night.”

Mr. Wynn, grumbling, agreed to the compromise.

“Take care she keeps out of my sight, then. Florence, I am going upstairs to

thank Lady Marlowe for what she has done for us."

But Hester appeared as he spoke. She had heard enough of the fracas, doubtless, to be aware they had returned.

Florence, with tears in her eyes, embraced and thanked her. Mr. Wynn kissed her hand.

"By ——, madam, you are one of the few women worthy to have children," he cried.

A few minutes afterwards, we separated for the night. Long after I was in my room I heard Mr. Wynn storming away downstairs, where he appeared to be giving the whole household warning, in language more forcible than is usually heard in polite society.





## CHAPTER VIII.

### GERALD MARLOWE'S DIARY.

*Combermere, Jan. 18th.*—To my astonishment I find myself domiciled under the same roof which contains Florence; her guest, in her house, and I am sensible of no other emotion than surprise. I had never dared to hope I could be so completely cured.

I hardly know how or why we came here; it certainly was from no desire of mine, and I do not feel at all sure now that Hester had any wish to exchange my company, flat, stale, and unprofitable as it doubtless seems to her, for Mr. and Mrs. Wynn's. She appears very little at her ease in their

society ; with them she is silent, pre-occupied and abrupt, like the Hester of long ago. For my part, though Wynn is most cordial, though Florence is eager to please as only Florence can be, I was heartily sick of my life before I had been here two days, and now it is nearly two weeks since our arrival, and words cannot express my weariness.

Wynn hunts or shoots every day, and of course I accompany him. I wonder whether he finds a perpetual tête-à-tête with a man he cannot care a straw for, most diametrically his opposite, as burdensome as my experience proclaims it? And there is no help for me. Even if I could make such an ass of myself as to propose to stay at home, what use or pleasure could it be, when I should only make the fourth in a perpetual quartette? How can women en-



dure their lives, when I find any kind of sport, even in the most uncongenial company, preferable to the infinite staleness of the existence they drag along? I don't wonder girls are tempted to be "fast," now that their minds are becoming awakened, at the same time that their energies are starved, and their faculties uncultivated.

The days we hunt are much better than the days we shoot; I meet more men I care about then; and besides, Wynn's is the fashionable style of sport, wholesale murder, and I am fashionable in no one taste or fancy. But, slow as are our days, our evenings are little better than the worst of them. I come home dog-tired, unable to do anything but listen to Wynn's chatter, or to Florence's light prattle, and her little songs. Heavens! how the times are changed with me since the era when I

thought her voice the most charming sound in the world, a music of which I could never tire.

Hester's demeanour to others has become a kind of criterion as to her opinion of myself. What she is to the Wynns, she used to be to me. I am certain that she likes me better now ; as well, at least, as any of her acquaintances ! Cold comfort ! to think that degrees of toleration should be the kind of liking I look for from my wife.

Had I had the least idea how uncongenial she would find our hosts, no power on earth should have brought me here. Now, my only object is to get away as soon as ever we can decently manage it. I cannot be brutal, for they are both sincerely hospitable and kind, and I know I ought to be most grateful. I try to be as civil as I can ; Hester does, I am sure, her very best,

but it is not altogether successful. She evidently likes Wynn the most of the two; that he likes her there can be no doubt, and saying this, is equivalent to saying he admires her. No man, it seems, is dolter-headed ass enough to ignore her claims to notice as completely as I allowed myself to do in my insane folly.

*Jan. 27th.*—I thought we should have had a quiet evening together last night, Hester and I; but I was destined to be disappointed. I spent it almost entirely alone, for Hester and Miss Hampson were occupied in mingling their tears together over Wynn's poor little child, whom some incapable brute of a nurse-girl had injured.

I wish to God we may have children! If she were the mother of my child, the fountains of Hester's heart might be broken up; I think nothing else could do it but a

universal deluge. It gave me a most curiously miserable and hopeless feeling to see her eyes brimming over, full of passionate feeling for a little being hardly animate, and not a drop of blood akin to her. If she loved me, I do not fancy I could be jealous that she should be tender to others; but it seems now as if my hard fate dooms me to be the only creature she cannot look upon with regard.

Thinking over her face, seeing it before me constantly, as it looked while she bent over the sick child, the spirit moved me to tell her—being left alone together, strange to say, to-day for a few minutes before dinner—that I had been reminded last night of a reminiscence of our early childhood. It had previously been buried deep down, among the things that seem forgotten for ever.

I asked her if she recollected a day that I spent with her, or she with me—I forget the scene—when a little dog of my mother's, a puppy not many weeks old, was taken suddenly ill. "I was reminded of that day last night, when I saw you with that baby in your arms."

"How complimentary to Mrs. Wynn's poor dear little child!" she said, smiling.

"I like you to laugh at me, Hester," I said; "but I am perfectly serious. I remember that I was grieved about the dog; but mine was the sorrow of balked possession, as much as unselfish regret for its sufferings: it had been promised to me if it lived. But you were really heart-wrung. You sat the whole day with it lying helpless in your arms, feeding it with wine and broth at intervals, and grilling yourself at a blazing fire to give it warmth. You

had tears in your eyes all day ; but only when it died at nightfall, after many convulsive struggles, did you find time to weep outright."

Wonderful and inexplicable are the freaks of memory. Her face, her look, seemed graven upon my recollection as I recalled that evening. She was not a pretty little girl by any means ; that was perfectly patent even to my childish perceptions, already alive to that sense of beauty which has been—and is—a passion with me. She had, I remember, an awfully dark complexion, and rather short, straight hair, falling heavily, and with no light nor wave about it ; but she had very large, serious eyes, and these wore a look of pity and anxiety which was almost agony, as she watched the gasps and struggles which convulsed the poor, little, tender frame of the

dying creature, sufferings which she was so miserably eager, yet so utterly powerless, to assuage.

"It was at Allingham, I remember. You have a good memory, Gerald," she said, softly, her face grave now at the recollection of the poor little thing's tortures.

"You had not forgotten it?" I asked.

"Oh no," she said, colouring. "But then, you know, I have a most unfortunate memory. I remember everything."

I was suddenly struck dumb. What a catalogue of sins of omission and commission she must have laid up in this sinister roll of her recollections against me!

*Jan. 31st.*—We had a quick run and find to-day, and I came round by Allingham on my way back to see if it could be made possible for us to find living room there. For I do not think Hester would be averse

to terminating our visit, if we had a good excuse to give for it. But there is no chance of Allingham being decently habitable for a month or more. I found my mother at Combermere on my return there. She is very anxious that we should go back to her. But the Wynns protested most energetically against our leaving them, and even taunted us with breach of promise, alleging that we had agreed to remain until Allingham is ready for us.

“And you cannot take Hester away now,” urged Florence. “I have just had a letter from Lady Stockport, to say that they can give us a few days the end of next week. You know what a friend she is of your wife’s, Gerald. I believe she is their inducement to visit us.”

Hester put in a vigorous protest here, but did not attempt to deny that she would



be glad to see them, though there was no great amount of rapture in her voice or manner of expression.

Florence was jubilant, Mr. Wynn complacent, to hear her decision. I could feel inclined to kick my good-natured host sometimes, he is so very empresseé often in his manner towards my wife. I all but did it the night he kissed her hand. He has never given such overt testimony of his admiration since, but he does not hesitate to avow openly, and that in Florence's presence, that he thinks Hester the ideal of womanhood, and myself the most fortunate of men. Florence seems rather amused than hurt at his devotion. Hester appears totally unconscious of it. Again I must put upon record the fact that I do not think I could be jealous if I knew that I had my wife's heart secure in my keeping. I could

never do her the dastardly injury of thinking her anything but the purest, the most upright of women. I have not been separated from her now one day for nearly a year, and that experience which only the intimacy of married life can give has taught me that if she is cold as ice, she is pure as snow. But it is because I esteem her thus the first and best of her sex that it enrages me to see Wynn's great red countenance bending down towards her pale, quiet face. I have seen him offering homage—another kind of homage certainly—at very different shrines, and it infuriates me to watch the man whom I have seen constantly in the hunting field at the carriage of Mrs. Connell, the talk of the whole county, paying my wife the attentions that he has offered up before to such a divinity.

Of course I know that the feeling a man has towards a woman is always of a nature

varying according to the character of the woman who inspires it. And Wynn is passionately fond of his child; I do not know that a good woman for the fond mother of his children might not have made him a respectable member of society. The knowledge that Hester showed tenderness towards his baby at a time of peculiar necessity has placed her, in his estimation, upon a pedestal such as no other member of her sex, probably, has ever occupied before in his eyes. It is not therefore altogether an unworthy homage that even such a man as Wynn offers to a good woman whom he admires. But it infuriates me to reflect that a fellow so thick-headed should have the wit to appreciate what I was blind fool enough to slight; and to see that every other man can show her, by the contrast of a very different behaviour, how very insensible a

clod she has had the misfortune to have for her husband. Sometimes I am very near forgetting myself entirely, when I see her speak to or smile upon any other man. I feel inclined then to rush away with her to the very other end of the earth; there to devote myself to her with a homage so complete and so slavish that it could not fail, in time, to soften her heart.

*Feb. 7th.*—Lord and Lady Stockport have arrived, bringing a train of servants and a baby with them. I expect their advent is only the beginning of a course of gaieties. I am sure a month of seclusion must have been a time of most wearisome trial to Florence. To-day Mr. Wynn had a letter from Sir Gregory Parkes, who married, it seems, Wynn's only sister. It appears that Parkes has been selected for this politico-commercial embassy to Brazil.

His wife goes with him, and they propose to leave England in six weeks, and have offered to spend part of the intervening time in a farewell visit to Combermere. Of course the offer was gladly accepted, and I have already heard Florence suggest more than one addition to the party. I think we are being let in for what we were told we should avoid, but I have made no remonstrance, for, honestly speaking, and in the strictest privacy of this my locked diary, I do not think that I shall find any society or circumstances more uncongenial to my present state than has been our hitherto limited party, so small and so nearly connected, yet on terms so little easy and familiar.

*Feb. 14th.*—The tide is coming in fast; there are ten adult visitors in the house already, besides ourselves and the Stock-ports. These consist of Sir Gregory and Lady

Parkes ; a Mr. Wynter, travelling Fellow of St. Benet's, Camb., the writer of a very good book on South America, who is going out as Secretary to the Embassy. Miss Parkes, sister of Sir Gregory, a specimen pure and simple of the moderately obnoxious type of the girl of the period ; a Mr. Stapylton, a rich booby in the Guards, with whom Florence seems on those flirting, chaffing, abominably free-and-easy terms so prevalent nowadays between men and women ; and Mr. Wrexham, who has filled more than one post in Lord D——'s Ministries—a gentleman of bucolic mind, with about as much acquaintance with the state of the country and the necessities of the age as Miss Parkes herself.

We are already fairly embarked in the routine of country-house life ; which sounds so pleasant in books, but which is so often

in real life a mere miserable réchauffé of London gaieties on a very limited scale, and with no choice of dramatis personæ. In London you can at least always escape from your company and yourself. Here we are surely and irrevocably doomed to endure a round of so-called enjoyment. Visions of balls and dinners have already begun, I see, to disturb Florence's mind.

*Feb. 21st.*—I wonder, if Florence had been my wife, whether she would have flirted, and whether I should have wrung her neck. I daresay I might have lacked resolution for the part of Othello. But I am certain she would not have played the blameless part of Desdemona, for she could have had no love for me that would have been powerful enough to keep her straight. At present Mr. Stapylton is decidedly in the ascendant. She has altogether with-

drawn any portion of patronage which she was pleased to bestow before upon her unfortunate (?) cousin. I don't think, I fancy, inordinately too much of myself, but I do think that a woman who once liked me might have given me nobler successors than that lout Wynn, and that empty-headed ass Stapylton.

" Having loved me, to decline  
On a range of lower feelings and a narrower heart than  
mine."

" Locksley Hall" again ! I have passed that phase some time ; but such is habit, that I see I can hardly avoid even now a touch of bitterness in writing of the beautiful, bewitching creature who was the idol of my youth ; though Heaven knows my soul is racked by very different anxieties from those which concern the fair Florence's behaviour at this time.



It is strange to me to watch, now that my eyes are clearer, and that I am an impartial spectator, how completely women lay themselves out for admiration. An extorted homage I should consider a most unworthy tribute; yet they labour hard for it, dress, language, manner, looks, all working to compel and take it by storm. And they might be so much more successful with so much less trouble. There are men enough to cry—

“Give me a look, give me a face  
That makes simplicity a grace.”

Simplicity is uncommon enough, certainly, to have all the charm of unfamiliarity; a charm more potent in its strangeness than any amount of practised wiles. Hester, for instance, sits quietly in her chair, thinking little, evidently, and caring less, what opinion men form of her. Yet she has

two very sincere admirers in this limited circle ; her old suitor, Lord Stockport, and Wynn. They are even rivals for her notice ; and I think the host is absolutely jealous of his guest. It seems odd, even to myself, to write this about one's wife. Heaven knows I could not do it were I not certain that if she cares for me little, she cares for them less ; or why, for instance, did she reject Stockport and accept me ? If I had not this conviction, I do not think that the same roof could hold me and any other man who coveted even one of her rare smiles.





## CHAPTER IX.

GERALD MARLOWE'S DIARY (*continued*).

*Combermere, Feb. 22nd.*—I wonder women have so long allowed themselves to be called and considered the inferior half of creation, when, as far as my experience goes, they are so much quicker, so much more versatile, so much more various in character, opinions, and feeling, than we are. I suppose it is because they do not know their strength ; or because, after all, it is force, not subtlety, that sways the world.

I remember some clever reviewer decreed once infallibly that a much-talked-of novel, of talent generally esteemed masculine, was written by a woman, for that it gave such


prominence to the delineation and action of female characters. I daresay the reviewer was right, and that the woman who wrote the novel was right too. Certainly the books written by men dwell with ludicrous instance upon the sayings, doings, and opinions of our own half of creation, and doubtless the converse may hold good. Women are queer creatures, truly; the more intimately you know them, the more do you discover that they possess principles, sentiments, and theories, respecting topics of which you would have thought that they could have no knowledge, and to which their minds have never assuredly been directed by others. And their ideas are so unexpectedly various. Every man I know has a particular way, the same way, of regarding certain questions, certain points of

honour; has theories cut and dried upon all social questions, such as our own immens superiority; the super-eminent virtue of muscular excellence; the sacredness of the game laws; the duty of sending boys to be belted at a public school, as we have been belted; the eternal necessity for the extirpation of various social grievances; the propriety of every woman's being more gentle, forgiving, faithful, unselfish; the happy constitution of circumstances which makes it needful that a man should possess the sterner virtues, abstracted from the trifling claims of such elaborate and unnecessary traits as valour, purity, self-abnegation, &c. &c. &c.

He can do no more; he does not afford much in the way of character—a pursuit in itself of so much interest that I think

honour; has theories cut and dried upon all social questions, such as our own immense superiority; the super-eminent virtue of muscular excellence; the sacredness of the game laws; the duty of sending boys to be bullied at a public school, as we have been bullied; the eternal necessity for the existence of various social grievances; the propriety of every woman's being moral, gentle, forgiving, faithful, unselfish; the happy concatenation of circumstances which, making it needful that a man should possess the sterner virtues, absolves him from the trifling claims of such unobtrusive and unnecessary traits as long-suffering, purity, self-abnegation, gentleness, constancy.

The men here do not afford much study in the way of character—a pursuit in which I take so much interest that I think I



might try to write a novel, if I had the slightest gift of constructiveness. Sir Gregory is a plodding, safe, Whig politician; by birth, a country gentleman of good descent and wide acres, upon which he spends little of his time, for he is entirely absorbed in public life, and the purlieus of Downing Street are his earthly Paradise. In Mr. Wynter there is much that at once attracts and shames me. He is one of the numerous north-countrymen who, going to small colleges at Cambridge with exhibitions from some obscure grammar-school, contrive, by living like anchorites and slaving like horses, to place themselves in positions worthy of their talents and industry. His travelling fellowship has given him experience of men and things, and his manners are sufficiently softened to leave only a characteristic

abruptness to remind you, to his credit, of his unpretending origin.

Mr. Wrexham I have already described ; he is a Derbyite, as Sir Gregory is a Palmerstonian ; having said this, it is unnecessary to say more. Lord Stockport improves upon acquaintance ; intimacy shows that he has much more cultivation than appears upon the surface, while it develops the sincere uprightness and unfeigned benevolence of his disposition. I daresay the having a young wife who loves him, and an heir to his title, have softened much that may at one time have made him appear stern, old-fashioned, and abrupt.

Wynn, Stapylton, and myself are quite uninteresting varieties of the genus homo. If they have more money, I may have more brains ; but my brains are less use to myself and to the rest of the world than their




money; bankrupt or dying, they would be more missed by mankind than I should be.

Certainly, whatever of dramatic interest may be gathered from the characters composing the party under this roof, must derive itself from the ladies; there are as many different types of women here, as there are individuals of that sex. I think I know the characters of Hester and of Florence as well now as one human creature ever can know the mind of another; and I have some inkling of the disposition and idiosyncrasy of each of the other ladies. Lady Stockport, a bright lively girl by nature, has developed through marriage and maternity into the mere domestic being so generally upheld and applauded as the ideal of the good woman. She is wrapped up in her husband and her child; she cares nothing, she never will care, for grand

causes and noble principles, except as their operation may or may not affect those objects of her sole solicitude. There is perhaps, one exception; she is a High-Church woman, and has not yet lost all her interest in topics which may affect the well-being of the Church.

Lady Parkes has no family; it is a pity, for she might be improved by a little softening influence; she is a good-humoured unrefined woman, jolly, stout, and cheerful; with a loud voice, a louder laugh, and a heavy step; with all youthful comeliness of face and form fast giving way to coarseness of hue and outline. She is fond of society and of outdoor sports, and is not insensible to the charms of sense as regards the good things of this world. Her manner is as masculine as her voice and carriage, and she is straightforward enough not to be



ashamed to proclaim herself her first consideration ; but she is sufficiently good-natured to be willing to do any kind office for any one else which will not affect in the slightest degree her own comfort or interests.

Miss Parkes is not a bad sort of girl ; she is not without some glimmerings of sense, spirit, and discernment, nor devoid of claims to good looks, though the present picturesque style of feminine attire has something to do with her pretensions to belle-ship. She has discretion to refrain from the extreme lengths to which most of her kind allow themselves to go in dress, manner, and conversation ; and tact enough to have protected herself and her fortune from falling as yet into interested keeping. A sensible man might make something of her ; if she marry a fool or a rake, she will

develop into that most detestable sequence of the girl of the period, a frisky matron.

Last night we had a conversation after dinner which brought out some salient points in the minds and characters of the ladies here. The conversation began by Florence giving us a most ludicrous description of a Woman's Rights meeting she had been to this season in London. She has a gift for piquant description, not unaided by a spice of malice and satire which gives flavour and salt, assisted as it is by her bright glances and speaking face. She has just that ready tact and quickness of perception which go so far in women to conceal the deficiencies of heart and education ; and which I used to think the expression of the brightest of intellects and sweetest of dispositions. She quizzed with witty sarcasm the appearance of the ladies who

filled the platform, their want of grace, beauty, and tact; their inaptness at speaking, their shallow assumption of cultivation, parody of argument, and misrepresentation of facts. It appeared that they had accepted the assistance of some gentlemen in aiding their preliminary arrangements, and in advocating before the public the cause for which they felt themselves, single-handed, powerless to combat. During the animated recital every one present laughed. Florence's way of putting things was enough to move the least risible faculties. But I saw that it was entirely despite herself that Hester could not refrain from smiling. There is always something eminently unsympathetic between her nature and Mrs. Wynn's, and I knew that the topic which Florence was now holding up to ridicule was one very near and dear to Hester's

heart. Although she could not forbear laughing outright once or twice, I saw the colour rising often into her cheeks in hot indignant flushes. Her foot tapped the carpet more than once impatiently when a more than ordinarily hearty burst of merriment greeted Florence's mimicry. Hester can bear serious opposition, but the two are so systematically opposite that she can never endure to discuss any cherished conviction in Mrs. Wynn's presence, to run the risk of its encountering the ordeal of Florence's light laughter and shallow jests.

The tirade finished, Lady Stockport observed sagely, at the conclusion of the peals of laughter which greeted the finale, "that the ladies in question would have been better employed at home in looking after their husbands and their children."

," Suppose they have no homes, and no

husbands, and no children?" suggested Hester, drily.

She longed to break a lance, I saw, and she thought she had found a worthier and a more serious adversary than laughing Florence. Lady Stockport, a little taken aback, had no reply ready. Mr. Wynn took up Hester's cause, not more, I fancy, to please her than to rebuke his wife. I have noticed that he finds sometimes an amiable pleasure in snubbing Florence. He generally does it indirectly; for I think he is a little afraid of her quick tongue. I suppose human nature would be unable to refrain from taking occasional vengeance for her very persevering and obtrusive flirtations.

"You ladies are so spiteful, Florence!" he said. "You are not satisfied with having got yourselves what is the object of your own ambition, but you crow over the

poor women who are not as lucky as you have been. Let them spout if they like; it pleases them, and it does not hurt us."

"The worst of these strong-minded women is that they are always so ugly," observed Mr. Stapylton. "So ungraceful, you know; so ill-dressed."

"I am not aware that weak-minded women are invariably beautiful, elegant, and well-dressed," said Hester, flashing upon him a glance of some contempt.

"No: and what would become of you gentlemen if we were as particular about externals in your case as you are in ours?" said Miss Parkes, who is not restrained by any scruples of delicacy in the use of her strongest weapon, her tongue.

Stapylton cannot consider himself good-looking, if he is even more conceited than he seems; he was silent. The con-



versation was resumed by Lady Stockport, who has retained much of her old liking for Hester, and who has an immense respect for her opinions. She turned to her, therefore, with wonder and incredulity written in her face.

"You do not mean to say, Lady Marlowe, that you go in for female suffrage and all that kind of thing?"

"For the whole programme; votes, admission to all the professions, learned and unlearned, equal claims of heirship; in short, for Woman's Rights in every possible particular for the women who desire them," said Hester, colouring a little at finding the eyes of the whole company directed to her, but staunch to her colours.

Horror and disappointment deprived Lady Stockport of speech; her face expressed intense disapprobation.

"Oh! you could never make the eldest, if a daughter, the heiress where there were sons!" cried Sir Gregory. "Why, the idea is preposterous. No man would keep his estate in his own name for two generations running."

"No; I would not make the eldest daughter heiress," observed Hester, calmly. "I would no more give everything to the eldest daughter than I would to the eldest son."

"What, abolish primogeniture?" cried Mr. Wrexham, thunderstruck.

"Decidedly," said Hester, smiling at his face of horror.

"Ah! you have neither brothers nor sisters," said Lady Parkes, triumphantly.

"Our day will come, Lady Marlowe," observed Mr. Goodrich, the Radical Member for Millchester, who arrived by the last

train before dinner to-day. "We shall have it all in time; universal suffrage, abolition of primogeniture, disestablishment, &c. &c., and we shall not have to wait long."

"I acquiesce most thoroughly in the general justice of your cause, Lady Marlowe," said Mr. Wynter, always keenly alive to the claims of new lights. "But I confess I see many difficulties in the way. It will be long before the prejudice of some persons and the vested interests of others will give a fair field to female doctors, for instance."

"You surely cannot approve of female doctors," cried Lady Parkes, shocked now, if she never was shocked before; and appealing to Hester, and overlooking Mr. Wynter, in her eagerness.

"I do not see how those who do not

object to women being nurses, can disapprove of their being doctors," said Hester, boldly. "They would only give skilled attention where they now give unskilled."

"Oh, how odious it would be to have a lady doctor!" cried Florence. "I should never have any confidence in her."

"Fancy the young ladies and gentlemen studying together!" said Lady Parkes. "And then we should have the lady doctors going in for gentlemen patients."

"How much worse than gentlemen doctors going in for women patients?" said Hester, nettled at her tone of horror.

A smile ran round the table.

"I think the medical profession is the noblest there is, and that suffering is a solemn and sacred thing," continued Hester, warmly. "It sets the person afflicted apart,

as it were. - Speaking for myself, I should reverence, not despise, the woman who chose the study of medicine from pure love of it, and the wish to do good. It could be only a feeling of philanthropy, or the strongest natural bent, that could make any one adopt a calling so laborious, and which must have at first setting-out so much to daunt and disgust."

"Yes, and I should like to know," cried Miss Parkes, emboldened by the hope of support, "what right any one has to say that a woman shall map out her life according to any other person's theory of what is proper? Why should we not follow our own genius and inclination, wherever they lead us, as men do? It may be very well for married women, poor things, to put themselves at the disposal of another, but

we unmarried ones have liberty, and mean to use it."

"Unmarried women are a mistake," said Mr. Stapylton. "Married women are ever so much jollier, so much easier to get on with, no nonsense about them."

"There is no chance of being refused by them, certainly," observed Mr. Wynter, drily.

Stapylton looked so savage, that there was evidently more than chance hitting here. But his forte is not, apparently, retort; he pulled his moustache, and attempted to wither his antagonist with a frown. Florence looked sharply from him to Mr. Wynter, then her glance travelled to Miss Parkes, and caught a furtive smile upon her countenance. Florence's face assumed an expression of very decided surprise and indignation.

“We are travelling away from the record,” said Mr. Goodrich, unmindful of this byplay. “Taking the profession of a medical man as a crucial test of the capacities of women, I maintain that the same qualities which make a good nurse would make a skilful doctor. Both require nerve, tact, promptness of hand and eye, gentleness, and presence of mind; a constitution able to endure fatigue, the power of observation, and a retentive memory. I do not perceive anything unfeminine in any or all of these characteristics. In every great crisis, whether of peace or of war, the women whose courage and whose self-abnegation bring them to the front, are found capable of doing as good work, and as much work, as any man. What would the hospitals of the Crimean war have been without Miss Nightingale, for instance?”

“Yes,” cried Hester, delighted, her eyes bright, her colour rising; “and I am old enough to remember clearly what an outcry there was at the idea of lady nurses. And now the highest praise and consideration are given to women who devote themselves to the care of the wounded in time of war.”

“But without going into what we may call the public side of the question, Lady Marlowe,” observed Lady Stockport, “you are all overlooking a far more wholesome safety-valve for your women of superabundant energies. There is plenty of work to be found among the poor, the ignorant, and the sick, which may be performed under proper guidance, and in the most feminine and unobtrusive manner.”

“Oh, please do not settle the question in this way,” urged Hester, “unless you are



prepared to say the same to men who crave a field for their energies. I am far from underrating the claims of the needy, or the privilege of relieving their wants; but why is it that it is always women who are relegated to administer to the necessities of others, without the slightest regard to their own wants, their own acquirements, or their own idiosyncrasies? Would you set a Mrs. Browning, a Charlotte Brontë, or a Miss Cobbe, to parish work? There are women who have a gift and a love for these labours; let them follow their bent, and permit others to choose their own more congenial career."

"Do you remember Sydney Smith's text at St. Paul's?" observed Miss Parkes, silyly. 'Oh! that *men* would therefore praise the Lord.'"

Every one laughed at this sally, with a

worse or a better grace. Mr. Wrexham, who had been evidently much shocked by some of the views set forth, found the opportunity, when the merriment subsided, of putting in his old-fashioned protest.

"I confess," he said, "that I am one of those auld-warld folk who think a woman's energies are best devoted to those of her own circle and household."

"There is not much danger of too many women thinking otherwise," observed Mr. Wynn. "My experience goes to show that most of them like their own ease and amusements too well to be in a hurry to give them up in the service of their own people, let alone the world at large."

"Like most men," said Miss Parkes, stoutly and ungrammatically.

"Like most men, myself most particularly," returned Wynn, with a grin, bowing.

He has good-humour enough to bear a hard, cut-and-thrust, hand-to-hand combat.

"Mr. Wynn is quite right," said Hester, seriously. "We all like ease and luxury well enough ; and, therefore, should honour those who cast aside comfort and convenience to aid or advocate any cause which they think the cause of truth and justice."

"Your way of looking at the question is, as your way would sure to be, both lofty and kindly," said Lord Stockport. "But, my dear Lady Marlowe, you forget that you diminish the chance of employment for men, by throwing open to women the avenues to what is now regarded as male labour, and by doing this you lessen the real amount of substantial welfare, instead of increasing it. Political economy is dead against you."

“So much the worse for political economy, then, if it is so,” said Hester. “But I do not see it. Suppose that the wives or daughters shared the work and the earnings of their husbands or fathers, the money would all go to the same end of improving the circumstances of the family. And if women were trained and accustomed to labour or professions, we should hear little of that overwork which kills many men, or of those sad cases of sudden destitution which fill our asylums and workhouses with helpless widows and orphans.”

“And I maintain further, considerations of political economy apart,” said Miss Parkes, “that every woman has a right to be free and use her freedom. Men seem to think we value little what they value so highly—the sense of liberty and indepen-

dence which the possession of a career and an income imparts."

"Yes," said Hester, not without bitterness. "If a woman has plenty of clothes to wear and as much food as she requires, most people imagine she has got all she wants. Many women feel this. There will always be many who will be not only contented but glad to be dependent, and there are many others who will always find the best and the most agreeable occupation a woman can have in their domestic vocations. But in discussing this question no one ought ever to forget that it is a matter of life and death to the thousands of women who have no one to labour for them. You all look upon it from a height of comfort and security, which cannot even gauge the measure of their poverty, friendlessness, and insecurity, nor appreciate the bitterness of

their struggles. It is the middle-class upon whom the disabilities of women tell. The poor are allowed and encouraged to labour. Your class is above want, and is also privileged to be as eccentric in the way of work or pleasure as it pleases."

"Our class is yours," said Florence. "Leave the tiresome middle-classes to take care of themselves. They are always telling us that they are the largest and most powerful part of the nation."

"I am essentially a middle-class woman," said Hester. "And I feel like one."

"And I also am a middle-class man," said Lord Stockport, "and I flatter myself that I have not forgotten their traditions and sentiments. But on this point I do not feel as you do. There is a rule of right and an absolute fitness of things which go beyond class distinctions. Women are to

make the home happy, to tend those belonging to them, to shed comfort and elegance around them ; to be pious, unobtrusive, domestic——”

“Like the modest violet, in fact, so well described by Miss Lavinia Spenlow,” observed Miss Parkes, satirically.

“I agree with you, Lord Stockport, but I go further,” said Hester. “All that you say they may do, and yet not leave more undone.”

“I see you will never agree!” cried Florence, evidently heartily tired of the conversation. “Shall we go into the drawing-room?”

About an hour afterwards, when I was standing by myself at the one end of the long drawing-room, looking at some photographs of Rome Mr. Goodrich had just brought from there, Hester came up to me. She is not in

the habit of running after me ; although she always receives my advances graciously enough in these days. She stood by my side a moment or two without speaking. Then she said, looking up at me—

“ You did not take any part in our discussion just now, Gerald ? ”

“ I thought you had sufficiently able and impartial champions without me. Goodrich and Wynter would not be supposed to advocate your cause from interested motives.”

She laughed, evidently pleased and relieved.

“ Then it was not because you thought I went too far ? ”

“ You would not change your opinions if I did,” I answered, looking fixedly at her.

The colour came into her cheeks.

“ No, nor would you wish me to do so,” she answered, smiling securely.



"No, indeed, my darling," I said, softly. "And I think upon this subject much as you do. I generally find my thoughts are much the same as yours, except when yours are, as they often are, much the wisest and noblest."

She said nothing, but she smiled up at me with that bright, heart-felt, flushing smile which sometimes goes almost near to persuade me that my wife loves me.

I never can speak five consecutive words to Hester in this house. At that moment Florence came fluttering up to ask her to play, and she left me.





## CHAPTER X.

GERALD MARLOWE'S DIARY (*continued*).

*Combermere, Feb. 28th.*—The weather has changed lately; it has been frosty enough for four days past to put a stop to our hunting. I should be better pleased if it would freeze properly, so that we might have a little skating to diversify the programme; at present there is only that greasy ice which freezes all night, and thaws enough to make walking thoroughly unpleasant towards the middle of the morning.

Shooting all day and every day becomes monotonous; even Wynn has cooled a little, and the ladies and the billiard-room

have been honoured during this interregnum of frost with more of our society than they have previously had. I have cottoned much to Goodrich; he has most agreeably disappointed the idea I have always had of him. He is a capital fellow, sensible, thoughtful; replete with information regarding the history of the last twenty years, which—owing much, if not mainly, to his exertions—has been a history of progress. I find none of that repellent, surly abruptness I had expected; he is blunt, but it is a pleasant abruptness, like the flavour of some piquant bitter. The result of much conversation is, that he presses upon me a speedy entrance into Parliament. I wish I could see my way clearly open to it. I would be no man's nominee; shall I ever be able to make good my wishes, wanting the golden key?

But I can think of nothing seriously now. I must seem a wavering fool to a man who knows nothing of my absorbing anxieties. Allingham must soon be ready, and after our departure thither will come—what—bliss unbounded and unspeakable, or misery equally vast and inexpressible; joy that may make a man of me; wretchedness that may crush me to the earth? Nay, I hope I should never be reduced to such depths as this. Whatever happen, I have always held that a man should be a man “for a’ that.” I think sometimes I am a weak idiot to be so dependent upon a woman’s word. But is not Hester different from all other women?

Lately she has been kind, sweet, gentle, almost loving, yet I dare not dream, lest the awakening should be too terrible.

*March 2nd.*—My mother sent for me the

day before yesterday, to ask me to arrange a matter of business for her. It seemed to me that the shortest way of settling it effectually would be to go to town and see her broker. I went early yesterday, having promised Florence that I would return without fail by the two o'clock express, as she was to have a dinner-party that night, and was good enough to say that she could not possibly do without me.

I was not particularly anxious to prolong my visit; Combermere holds all that has any attraction for me. I had telegraphed to the broker to expect me; I concluded the business satisfactorily before one, and then went to Covent Garden on an errand of my own.

In signing the necessary papers at the broker's office I had remarked the date, the 1st of March. It flashed upon me that

this day last year was my wedding-day. I had utterly forgotten it before leaving Combermere, and I was anxious to take Hester some token that should show her that I had not forgotten the anniversary altogether. I am not fertile in resource; I could think of nothing on the spur of the moment that would be sure to please her but flowers; she loves them passionately.

By going to Covent Garden I missed the two o'clock express, and could not leave Euston Square before half-past two, by a slower train. It was, of course, almost dark when I arrived at the little L—— station, and I found neither fly nor carriage there; as I had been expected by the earlier train, I suppose Wynn had given me up. I had a three-mile walk before me, but I was in the humour for it. It was a perfect evening, more like late autumn than early

spring. There was a frosty touch in the air which exhilarated and crisped the atmosphere, and tipped the hedges and grass with a hoary rime. It was twilight when I got into the park at Combermere, yet not so dark but that I could discern a little black robed figure coming from among the trees upon the right, just after I had passed the lodge. My heart leaped up, telling me with confidence that it was Hester. Despite the gathering dusk, I could see when my wife drew near that she looked not only pleased, but pretty; the air had brightened her eyes and brought roses into her cheeks.

"You are come," she said, approaching me slowly, the roses deepening in their hues.

"Apparently," I answered, happy as a king: "and you are here to meet me!"

"The gentlemen came home very early, and they were all in the billiard-room, and it was so hot and so stupid," she murmured, rather incoherently.

"Then you *didn't* come to meet me," I said, "but are here permiscuous like, Hester?"

"I didn't say so," she said, coming nearer.

"Take my arm, you little prevaricator. You are ashamed to confess you thought of me; I am proud to show that I have remembered you. Look here!"

I drew away the papers skilfully folded round my flowers. They were roses of many kinds and tints, the rarest Covent Garden could boast, and I had chosen them, remembering what this flower, loved of poets and lovers, means.

"Oh! how good of you," she cried,



clasping my arm with both her hands.  
“How lovely!”

I like to see my wife excited, it is so rare an experience. But I was vexed that she saw no significance in the choice of the gift.

“Do you know what I had in my mind when I got them, Hester?” I asked.

“No,” she said, faintly.

“Guess,” I said.

“That it was our wedding-day?” she hazarded, blushing.

“Had you forgotten it this morning?” I asked.

“No; I never forget,” she said; “I thought of it the first thing.”

“And you never reminded me——”

“No,” she said, raising her head a little—was it a trifle haughtily?—“I could not feel sure that you would wish to be reminded.”

"You will know better some day," I answered, rather wounded.

"Give me the flowers," she said, hastily, taking them out of my hands.

Hester has all a shy woman's nervous horror of scenes. I shall have trouble to make her avow it, if she loves me. I let the matter drop for the present.

"How did you know that I was coming by this train?" I asked her. "I had intended to catch the one before it."

"Because I saw you didn't come by the one before it," she said.

"Then you have been watching for me, waiting for me, out in the cold and darkness for an hour?" I said. "My darling, how shall I thank you?"

I took her face between my hands, and kissed her till her cheeks were crimson. I am ordinarily as gentle as a sucking dove

in my demonstrations. I am as afraid of scaring her as the fowler is of alarming the timid bird he is seeking to lure securely into his keeping. But to-night I was too much overjoyed to be prudent.

"Oh, Gerald, take care of my flowers!" she cried, releasing herself shyly, as soon as I would let her.

"Then you care more for the flowers than for me?" I said.

"No, I don't!" she said.

"Hester, do you value them because I gave them to you?" I asked.

"Gerald, don't be a goose!" she said.

"You are polite."

"You called me a prevaricator just now," she said; "I didn't come out to answer questions."

She tried to take my arm again, sagely, but I insisted upon putting it round her

waist. Should I ask her to hear now what I have to say to her, and make her give me an answer, I thought? Was it not possible that she might be softened to hear to-day how infinite a blessing the marriage which I had thought a curse had turned out to me? Did she care enough for me to forgive my cold wooing, and the neglect of the first months of our married life? Would she, accepting my devotion, promise to try and love me, as I now loved her, in the days to come?

"Gerald," she said, suddenly, looking up at me just as the words were on my lips, "there is a letter to-day from Mr. Jerningham. He says Allingham will be ready to receive us as soon after next Saturday as we like."

"We will go that very day," I cried. This decided me to hold fast to my original

decision. There will be no fear of the curiosity of prying eyes, no intrusive social claims, to come between me and my happiness there. That it will be bliss, not wretchedness, that awaits me, I feel now a fond and delightful hope.

"To-day is Thursday," she said, hesitatingly. "I don't really think we could leave them here as soon as that, Gerald. They have been very kind in wishing to keep us so long."

I acquiesced, impatiently enough, after some remonstrance, and it was settled that we should fix the middle of the next week as the limit of our stay.

"You are not sorry, then, to leave Combermere?" she asked me. "You do not dislike the idea of going to Allingham?"

"I should like to go anywhere that you were going," I said, eagerly.

She gave a smile and a sigh. I do not think she took this for much more than a compliment. Presently she adjured me to let her go, as we were getting in sight of the windows. We paced demurely arm in arm, therefore, towards the house; as we stepped on to the terrace, two other forms, also a man's and a woman's, flitted quickly past us, and entered before us. I could not discern their faces for the darkness, but I thought I knew the figures.

"Are not they Miss Parkes and 'Stapylton?" I said, in some surprise.

"No," answered Hester; "Mr. Stapylton is taller and not so broad as that. But I think it is Miss Parkes."

We entered the hall, and I saw that there was a slight smile on her countenance; as I was about to ask her the reason of it, Florence came out of the library. She

turned bright, amused, mocking eyes upon us.

"You might have given me a hint of your private information, Lady Marlowe," she said. "It would have prevented Johnson's having a long, cold drive, and would have saved Gerald a long, cold walk."

"I had no private information," Hester said, gaily, running upstairs.

"I am very sorry for Johnson, but I found the walk anything but long and cold," I said.

"What a devoted couple it is!" said Florence, following Hester up the stairs, and turning, half mocking, half melted, wholly naughty and charming, to flash the brightest of satirical glances upon me, standing unabashed in the hall beneath.

"You must scold Johnson for being so

stupid as not to wait for you, Gerald," was her parting shaft.

I had not asked Hester to wear my flowers; but I watched with the utmost anxiety to see her enter the drawing-room. It was nearly full when she came in, and there were various formal greetings for her to go through, as, owing to our long seclusion, she had not yet appeared at all in public in Midlandshire. I sought in vain for an opportunity to exchange a word with her before dinner, but I saw at the first glance that she wore two of my roses, scarlet in hue; one nestled among the thick, dark folds of her hair; the other was at her breast. She had put off the thick deep mourning dress she had invariably worn till now in the evenings; the one she had on was still black, but it was lace, cut a little open in the front, and with sleeves which



fell back somehow from the elbow ; and her neck and arms gleamed smooth and round through the transparent veil.

Her eyes were still bright, on her cheeks there still glowed a deep scarlet flush ; her dress, the flowers in her hair, her dark locks, eyes, and complexion, her figure, more full than is the wont with Englishwomen, gave something Spanish, almost Oriental, to her appearance.

I was separated from her at dinner by the whole length and breadth of the table. I sat at Florence's left hand, Hester at Wynn's left. A very great man and his august wife occupied the right of the host and hostess. It was not long before I saw Florence's bright eyes single out Hester, and dwell upon her.

"I had no idea we were all to be so completely outdone by your wife, Gerald," she

said, in a low voice, the potentate at her other side being fully occupied with his dinner. I smiled, and followed her glance; Hester was leaning back a little in her chair, her hands folded quietly before her, listening to her neighbours, not speaking much herself. She looked composed, serene, distinguished; successful because of the utter absence of the slightest effort to attract.

"She cannot help it; if she could she would," I said, triumphantly.

The vivid colour had faded from her cheeks, and the glad brightness had died away out of her eyes, but sense and intelligence dignified her features; and a speaking glance of interest, a half smile of pleased attention answered her neighbours' efforts to entertain. I knew the man at her left hand. He was a well known savant, an intimate personal

friend of Hester's, a person she liked and respected almost as much as it is possible to like and revere any one. Yet I recollected with delight that had no pride in it—only wonder and gratitude—how differently she had received my homage from his ; I recollected how her cheeks had flushed, how her dark eyes had gleamed, how her tongue had faltered, at our meeting this afternoon.

As I sat gazing at the face which was now the dearest, the most lovely thing on earth to me, the recollection of this evening last year rushed upon me. We had dined, and were sitting together afterwards in a great bare, chilly room at the Pavilion Hotel at D——, in a tête-à-tête which would now be to me the ideal of happiness and comfort. Then she was silent, stiff, shy. I was just sensible that something must be

expected of me, and I racked my brain to be conversational, for I could not be lover-like.

What a miserable wretch I was that day! Degraded in my own sight, conscious that I was marked out in the eyes of others as the man who had married the great heiress for her money! Hating my chains, I felt then with the acuteness of a slave new to bondage how irrevocable was my servitude. All hope of content, all sense of self-respect, seemed gone from me for ever. And stronger than any of these pleasing sensations was the sense of shrinking from the companionship of her whose presence makes now the light and glory of my life.

Am I fickle? I thought with a start, or did I never love Florence truly? Remembering what I felt when she threw me over, what I should feel if Hester were to

scorn me, I see that I took boyish romance for love, the bright fascination exercised by youth, beauty, and propinquity, for the passion which a man can feel but once in his lifetime, and which now sanctifies the dear image of my wife.

Florence herself broke plaintively upon my reverie, an aggrieved frown darkening her brow. Her right hand supporter was still engrossed with his dinner. She had been disregarded for some minutes both by him and by me.

"Have you *no* conversation, Gerald?" she asked, after the inimitable girl in *Punch*. "You used to be amusing once."

"I am so out of practice, you see, and after Stapylton I fear my best efforts would fall very flat."

"Oh, I am disgusted with Mr. Stapylton," she said, glancing to where he sat, for-

lorn and unfriended, between two fat dowagers, towards the bottom of the table. "He has served my purpose, and I have not served his."

"How? He is dismissed? What has he done?" I asked, not comprehending either her words or the glance that accompanied them.

"Oh, I don't know," she said, hesitating. "Yes I do, though. For one thing—I suspect he has been paying me only a divided allegiance."

"You require absolute empire? Then I think you may find some difficulty in filling his place. We are so fickle, you know. Don't discard him too rashly."

I spoke quite jestingly, but she looked at me as if suspecting a double meaning.

"You will not do instead of him at any rate," she said, a little sharply.

"No, I am too fond of liberty ever to be a very obedient vassal."

"You equivocate! That is not the reason. Already you are the veriest slave that ever lived!" she retorted, abruptly, "and you glory in your chains."

I laughed and did not attempt to deny the impeachment.

"Nevertheless," she said, "you can forget your bondage, and try to amuse me to-night. We are always cousins, you know."

Thus challenged, I did my best. We laughed and talked as if the last five years that had rolled over our heads had receded, leaving us boy and girl again together.

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